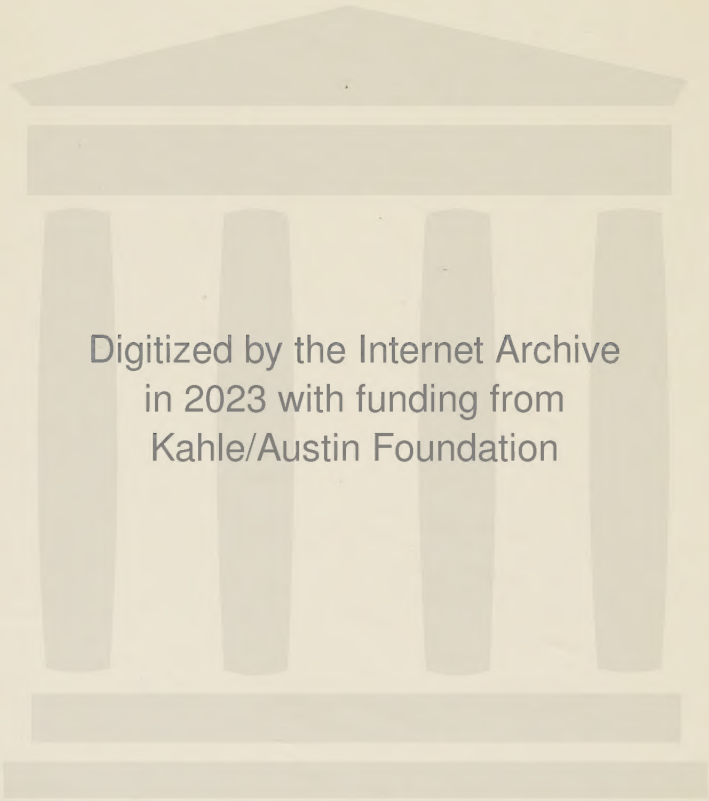
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Fanny Burney

By

Edith J. Morley

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
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FANNY BURNEY

1752–1840

The revival of interest in the social life of the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, as exemplified by the publication of the diaries of the Rev. James Woodforde and of Farington, and by the *Reminiscences* of Horace Walpole, together with the recent édition de luxe of Jane Austen's novels, recalls to mind the work of Fanny Burney, a distinguished, but nowadays somewhat neglected, writer of that period. To read her work is to obtain one of the most delightful representations of English life in the time of George III. Her early novels—*Evelina* and *Cecilia*—introduce us to the friends and acquaintances of her girlhood and youth, seen through her eyes and illumined by her genius; *Camilla* elaborates the social ideals and theories reproduced in the greater works which preceded it, so that the three novels may be regarded as an epitome of the life and thoughts, and above all of the feelings, of young women in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Taken together, they form a brilliant achievement which contributed new elements to the novel as inaugurated by Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, and Smollett: they are the heralds of greater work in their own domain —the novels of Jane Austen. On every count, therefore, they merit the attention of present-day readers.

The best commentary on Fanny Burney's novels, the best illustration of the society they depict, and probably the most brilliant work of their author, is to be found, however, in her *Diary and Letters*. The eighteenth century is peculiarly rich in diaries and memoirs; its letters are unsurpassed in English literature for the interest of their matter, the beauty of their form, and for the intimate and leisurely discussion of events and their bearing. But for sheer fascination, for variety and interest, above all as a superlative picture of almost all the people of interest in their day, Fanny Burney's diary challenges comparison even with the greatest. If Boswell's *Life* gives us the full-length portrait of Johnson, Fanny Burney's gives us a picture in little which rivals the more detailed study, and shows us another aspect and other traits of the great man than those Boswell was able to depict. None but a woman could show Dr. Johnson's treatment of women; only an intimate of Mrs. Thrale could reveal his latter

days at Streatham. And not Boswell himself could surpass her admiration for his hero, nor the consummate judgement and genius which she brought to her task. In one way, too, her knowledge went beyond that of Boswell whom she disliked and undervalued[1]: Johnson's love for her was blended with a recognition of her talents. His respect for his 'little character-monger' was something quite different from his attitude towards Boswell, and he revealed to her a side of himself which Boswell could never discover for all his probing. Thus in a letter to Daddy Crisp, written in March, 1779, Fanny is already saying: 'Dr. Johnson has more fun and comical humour and love of nonsense about him than almost anybody I ever saw: I mean with those he likes; for otherwise he can be as severe and as bitter as report relates him.'[2]

In the *Diary*, too, we meet many of the personages with whom we make acquaintance in the *Life*—Burke, for example, whom we learn to know as he appeared in society, and as chief prosecutor of Warren Hastings[3]; Burke's son and brother, and, in addition, his gentle wife. And since the *Diary* has no hero, no character has to be subordinated to any other: each may reveal himself in his own words and may hold the stage as long as he proves amusing to the writer and her audience.

Moreover, Fanny Burney's range is extraordinarily wide, and her experiences varied as those of few women could have been in her generation. She lived 88 years—years which extended from the reign of George II to that of Victoria, which saw the loss of the American colonies, the French Revolution, the rise and fall of Napoleon, the Lord Gordon riots, Peterloo, the beginnings of Chartism, and the passage of the first Reform Bill. Her eldest brother sailed with Captain Cook and fought under Nelson; her husband, a French *émigré*, belonged to the court of Louis XVI, and was a friend of Talleyrand and de Narbonne; her father, one of the leading musicians of his day, was acquainted with and delighted in entertaining all the most distinguished men and women in London. As a little girl she lived in Leicester Fields when the family first came to town, moving thence to Sir Isaac Newton's old house in St. Martin's Street. Here, under her father's roof, the shy, retiring child met actors (Garrick was an intimate), painters, singers, musicians, politicians, courtiers, society ladies, and society 'lions' of all sorts, and writers, including the members

[1] Charlotte Barrett's edition of the *Diary*, Bickers, 1876, vol. iii, pp. 298–9 (1790).

[2] Cf. her account in 1778, *op. cit.*, vol. i, pp. 63–70.

[3] *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, pp. 509, 528, &c.

of the Literary Club, to which her father belonged. She received no regular teaching of any sort, but in addition to her intercourse with, or rather observation of, men and women, she seems to have had the free run of her father's extensive library (it contained only one novel—*Amelia* —however), and the advantage of acting as his amanuensis and general factotum when he was composing his *History of Music* and writing accounts of his various tours. She adored her father, respected her step-mother (who taught her to sew and persuaded her to make a bonfire of her first novel), and was deeply attached to her many brothers and sisters. The Burney family life was unusually happy, so that Johnson, who believed (vide *Rasselas*) that 'domestic discord . . . is not easily avoided', was moved to say of it, 'Of this consanguineous unanimity I have had never much experience, but it appears to me one of the great lenitives of life' (*Letters*, ii. 237). Fanny Burney had no doubts on the subject.

Outside her father's house, she had a second home at Chessington, where her adopted 'Daddy' Crisp was always ready to receive her and, later on, to advise her and to criticize her work and rejoice at its success —and even, when necessary, as in the case of the first attempt at drama, *The Witlings*, to warn her against production and to show his friendship by his adverse judgement.

It was at Chessington that Fanny danced the famous dance of joy round the mulberry tree, when she heard that Dr. Johnson approved of *Evelina*: 'it almost crazed me with agreeable surprise—it gave me such a flight of spirits that I danced a jig to Mr. Crisp, without any preparation, music, or explanation—to his no small amazement and diversion.'[1] And many are the other happy memories connected with the lonely house and its inmates—not only Daddy Crisp, but his sister, Mrs. Gast; the owner of the hall, Mrs. Hamilton, and her silly niece, Miss Kitty Cooke, who, fond as she was of them, must have provided the young character-monger with much food for observation.[2]

With the publication of *Evelina* in 1778, Fanny Burney's already wide circle of acquaintances was much enlarged, and she became intimate with people she had barely known before. To Johnson and the Thrales we have already referred; then, too, there was the entry to the 'blues'—Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Chapone, Hannah More, and the momentous introduction to Mrs. Delany—herself one of the most interesting women surviving from an earlier generation. Mrs. Delany[3] and the Duchess of Portland were extraordinarily polite to the young

[1] *Op. cit.*, vol. i, 1778, p. 18.
[2] *Op. cit.*, vol. iii, p. 505.
[3] *Op. cit.*, vol. i, pp. 515–20.

authoress, and she speedily lost her heart to the former, whose charm and virtues and intelligence and courtly manners must have made her a peculiarly attractive personality. In Mrs. Thrale's company Fanny made her first tour to Bath and the west of England; to Brighthelmstone and to Tunbridge Wells; in Mrs. Delany's she went to Windsor, and suffered the fateful introduction to the King and Queen.[1] This resulted in the invitation which blasted five years of Fanny's life, but produced one of the most fascinating parts of her *Diary*. She was offered the post of second Keeper of the Robes, or Dresser to her Majesty, Queen Charlotte—apparently as a recognition of her literary success. Fanny hesitated and held back, with a sure instinct of her disqualifications for the life of an underling at Court. She had been fêted, praised, welcomed, and deferred to by high and low; she had received so many invitations that she had been forced to insist that she could not go into company on more than three days a week; she had been flattered for her writings and loved for her modesty and good-natured wit; the world was all before her where to choose, when the prospect was suddenly to be bounded by the walls of St. James's, of Windsor, or of Kew. Intercourse with the greatest in every department of thought and achievement was to be exchanged for the pettiness of court-life and backstairs jealousies; leisurely activity in literary pursuits was to give way to the cares of an overworked waiting-woman, and the tedium of the toilette, '... that eternal business—never ending and never profiting! I think to leave the second syllable out, for the future; the *-ette* is superfluous, the first is all-sufficient.' (Vol. ii, p. 366.) However, Dr. Burney and her other friends, even Burke, even Reynolds, would not contemplate refusal of the royal bounty, so to court Fanny went on July 17, 1786, and she remained there, cabin'd, cribbed, confined until July, 1791. The *Diary* and letters of those years, however, provide a feast indeed. We become intimately acquainted with all the royal family—the 'sweet' queen—gentle, affectionate, intelligent, kindly, but inconsiderate to a degree which is explicable only by Fanny's own excuse for her—that she had no conception of what lack of robustness and ill-health meant; nor could she realize the strain of standing in attendance for anything from four to seven hours a day; the fatherly, benevolent, unintelligent king; the princesses, from the princess royal to the baby princess Amelia; the rowdy, ill-conditioned princes, of whom the Duke of York, his father's favourite, is the only one in the least attractive—all these and their habits and mannerisms become familiar to us. We stand on the Terrace at Windsor to see the

[1] *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, pp. 25–6.

stately royal procession pass, and rejoice when the king stops to speak to our friends; we see him burst into the parlour where the unfortunate equerries are snatching a hasty cup of tea; we hear how he offers one of them a glass of barley-water to refresh him after a long day's hunting, which has exhausted every one but the indefatigable sovereign; we take part in drawing-rooms, and court balls, in royal progresses and church-goings, card-parties and readings. We know all that the Queen's Dresser can repeat of what she observes —not everything, for she is infinitely discreet and loyal—of the immaculate family life of the royal family and of their political opinions and prejudices. 'Every gentleman should read Burke on the French Revolution', says the King, but his views on Warren Hastings are anathema and inexplicable to all the royal household—unless as the result of a deliberate and wicked sacrifice of principle to party. We hear what books the queen reads, and what she thinks about them; she does not approve of novels, except *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, and her daughters may read nothing without she has first sampled it. This fear of novels is curious, for plays are read in her dressing-room, or attended by the whole court, which certainly do not escape the taint of eighteenth-century licentiousness. She shares the strange eighteenth-century love of reading sermons, and even presents Fanny with a copy of those of Dr. Ogden; in a small way she is herself a scribbler, and on one occasion at least the Dresser is employed to finish a copy of her verses to the Earl of Harcourt, when she had 'composed three lines but could not get on'. When the King recovers from his attack of insanity, Fanny is commissioned to write verses in the Queen's name for the happy occasion. These are presented by the baby princess Amelia, who concludes

> The little bearer begs a kiss
> From dear Papa for bringing this,

and, as the author tells us, 'the little bearer begged not in vain'.

All these details of King George's home life, the account of his composure when attacked by a mad woman, soon after Fanny went to Court, the vivid description of the gloom and wretchedness caused by his illness, of his personal habits, his untiring activity, personal abstemiousness, rapid speech, informal, even undignified manners, hard work, prejudices, illiteracy ('Was there ever such stuff as great part of Shakespeare? only one must not say so! But what think you? What? Is there not sad stuff? What? What?'), and popularity, are extraordinarily interesting as a commentary on his public life and tenacious upholding of the royal prerogative whatever the cost.

But even more interesting to most of us are the sketches of the minor people who frequented or lived at Court—Colonels 'Wellbred' (Fulke Greville) and 'Fairly' (Digby—the one man whom Fanny seemed likely to contemplate as a possible husband, until Miss 'Fuzelier', one of the pretty Miss Gunnings, came in the way); the 'philosopher', M. de Luc and his wife; the impossible 'Mr. Turbulent', with his outrageous manners; Miss Planta, 'friendly and well-disposed', with no fault but that of dullness; and above all, the senior Dresser, Mrs. Schwellenberg, Cerbera or La Présidente. It is almost impossible to believe that Fanny's description of this lady is not a caricature: her malignancy, jealousy, furious temper, and cruelty are almost incredible, yet we know that Fanny prided herself on her accuracy and fidelity to fact. 'I never mix Truth and Fiction: all that I relate in Journalizing is *strictly*, nay, *plainly*, Fact: I never, in all my Life, have been a Sayer of the Thing that is not'—so she wrote to Daddy Crisp in 1779, but one hopes, for her sake, that the portrait of Cerbera was, nevertheless, somewhat heightened. It is only fair to say it is corroborated from other sources, e. g. Mrs. Papendieck's *Court and Private Life in the Time of Queen Charlotte*.

Mrs. Schwellenberg accentuated all the disagreeables of the uncongenial duties at Court[1]; she made Fanny's life wretched, and ultimately determined her resignation. Every moment of her leisure was claimed by the tyrannical, stupid old woman; she was forced to play cards, which she hated, to listen to abuse whether she came or stayed away, to endure intolerable treatment, and, worst of all, to submit, and, out of consideration for the Queen, to hold her tongue. Her determination not to gossip or cause mischief, in spite of her loneliness and misery, is not the least admirable thing about her.[2] It is only fair to add that Mrs. Schwellenberg professed affection for the 'good Miss Bernar', and that, when once the enormity of retiring had been committed, she showed her former victim civility and even affection when she visited the palace.

Perhaps the most congenial duty which fell to Miss Burney's lot while at court was to attend the trial of Warren Hastings. For one thing she was able to sit down, no small boon to the weary dresser with her early rising and long hours; for another, it brought her once more in touch with old friends, who treated her with the old respect for her achievements. Burke and Windham, whose part in the trial she mercilessly condemned to their faces, and that, in spite of her acknowledged ignorance of their cause, repeatedly came from

[1] *Op. cit.*, vol. iii, p. 38.

[2] *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, pp. 421–4, and vol. iii, pp. 116–17.

the 'managers' box' to converse with her. Here, too, she got a chance of conversation with her relatives, from whom her life at court almost completely isolated her. As one reads her descriptions of the trial and of the speeches, and catches glimpses of Warren Hastings, worn, ill and dejected, or hears Burke's fiery speeches and interruptions, or sees Windham acting as his 'flapper'[1], ready to assist him in any difficulty, or listens to Fox's angry denunciations, the scene at Westminster Hall is conjured up, with its violent partisanship, brilliant setting, and long spun out emotionalism. Fanny's account should be contrasted with Macaulay's: the point of view is different, so are the politics (for Fanny's belief that politics are not a feminine subject does not prevent her taking sides with more heat than justice); but the warmth and vividness of colouring are equally striking, and Fanny has the inestimable advantage of being an auditor and spectator, and one who is trained to reproduce what she sees and hears. No wonder the Queen—and sometimes the King also—expected her to re-enact the scene for them in the evening: for this part of her duties, at least, she was singularly well fitted. The *Diary* proves how brilliantly she must have described the prisoner's entry and humiliation as he knelt momentarily at the bar of the house: or the solemn procession of the managers with Burke at their head; or Burke's eloquence and genius, which none was better able to appreciate than herself, and that in spite of her prejudice.

It is at the trial that Fanny's changed appearance and ill-health first attract the attention of her friends, and these insist on the necessity for her retirement. Windham threatens to 'set the Literary Club upon' Dr. Burney, if he does not take some steps to bring it about; Boswell says they can put up with it no longer: 'we are all grown quite outrageous. . . . If you do not quit, ma'am, very soon, some violent measures, I assure you, will be taken. We shall address Dr. Burney in a body.'

And indeed the need for an immmediate withdrawal from court was urgent. The poor Dresser was miserably ill, nervous, and unhappy. Even her father is now in haste for her to come home, eager to open his arms, his house, his purse to her. Together they draw up a memorial to the Queen: but Fanny still hesitates to present it. At last, after an actual breakdown and the warnings of various physicians, the paper, with a covering letter, is sent through the reluctant—not to say abusive—Mrs. Schwellenberg. The Queen, who

[1] The flapper's duty was 'gently to strike with his bladder the mouth of him who is to speak, and the right ear of him or them to whom the speaker addresseth himself'. *Gulliver's Travels*, Third Voyage, ch. ?.

surely must have guessed what was coming, appeared astounded. She had expected to bind Fanny to her for life; she had shown her unusual kindness and consideration, for instance, in not letting her sit up to attend after a court ball, when she had already almost fainted in the royal presence; a holiday was offered—and refused—and at last a reluctant consent to the retirement was given. Even then, permission to depart was granted only after six months' delay: one cannot wonder that the enfeebled dresser, with all her loyalty, came as near to anger with her royal mistress as her humble gratitude allowed. Years later, she was moved to write, when describing the gracious condescension shown her on one of her periodical visits to court, that she had 'suffered too much from a situation so ill adapted to my choice and disposition, to do justice to her (the Queen's) opposition, or to enjoy its honour to myself.' Now, when the Queen received her almost affectionately, 'I longed to kneel and beseech her pardon for the displeasure I had felt in her long resistance of my resignation.'—Poor Fanny, and poor Queen. It is not easy for modern readers to reconcile themselves to the adulation and formality of the Hanoverian Court, where even the highest in rank backed respectfully against the walls to leave room for the royal personages; where gifts or petitions were presented kneeling, where men and women stood humbly—sometimes for hours on end, in their majesties' presence, and where intercourse with friends, even thoughts and prejudices, had to be similarly regulated by those of the royal family. Fanny returned to freedom and her friends with a sigh of relief, but she retained her affectionate gratitude to the King and Queen for the rest of her life.

A few months' care and nursing, and a tour with a friend in the west of England, restored her to health and happiness, and she spent the next year or so between her father's house at Chelsea, and her sister's or the Lockes', her friends at Norbury. Here she met the French *émigrés*, and not the least interesting part of the *Diary* is the account of their misfortunes and their courage in adversity—written always from a markedly royalist point of view. Mme de Stäel is the most distinguished of the women exiles, and her attitude towards her fellow-authoress is delightfully depicted. Miss Burney finds her 'impossible to resist', and it is only when Dr. Burney hints that unfavourable stories about her have been brought to England, and been repeated to him by the Burkes, that Fanny gets out of accepting an invitation to her house. Mme de Stäel is indignant at her drawing back from the proffered friendship: 'Is a woman in tutelage for her whole life in England?' she asks; it seems to her that Fanny, at forty, is 'comme une demoiselle de quatorze ans'.

But Fanny shows more independence in her attitude towards M. D'Arblay. None of Dr. Burney's prudential and fatherly cautions weighs against her feelings in this instance. Not even her father's authority can shake her certainty, that marriage with D'Arblay presents her best chance of happiness: the fact that he is French, an exile, ruined, even penniless, does not frighten her, and at the end of July, 1793, they become man and wife, though they have nothing but her pension of £100 to live upon. The story of their early married life, of the Chevalier's energetic but often misguided and unsuccessful attempts at gardening make good reading, and never was love in a cottage more eminently successful, even though both partners had been accustomed to the luxury of courts and the society of the town —and this in an age when country life was seldom appreciated, and when Daphnis and Chlöe were usually only too glad to doff shepherd's dress after a very brief essay of very unrealistic pastoral amusement. When their little son is born, Mme D'Arblay returns to authorship, and completes her third novel, *Camilla*, in order to pay for a small house of their own building; she also once more essays success as a dramatist. In 1801 comes the death of Mrs. Phillips, Fanny's best beloved sister, and in the same year M. D'Arblay seizes the opportunity of the peace preliminaries to go to France to look after his property. Soon afterwards his wife and child follow—and are unable to return for ten years, owing to the renewal of hostilities, and then only after untold difficulties. The *Diary and Correspondence* of these years are naturally very curtailed: intercourse with England was extremely difficult, to get remittances impossible. M. D'Arblay could not rejoin his wife until after Napoleon's abdication in 1814, and after the death of Dr. Burney, which occurred in the same year. The husband and wife were back in France before Napoleon's return, and the latter fled to Brussels in March, 1815, leaving General D'Arblay, who was in the service of Louis XVIII. Again we are privileged to read a vivid first-hand account of The Hundred Days, of Waterloo, and of life in Brussels during the crisis. The poor diarist, her son in England, her husband on a mission she knows not where, has only too much cause for her lament: 'This is no *siècle* for those who love their home, or who have a home to love.' The account of her journey to Trèves in July, 1815, to visit her husband, who was lying seriously ill from the kick of a horse, is written with all the old verve and spirit. The misadventures and the misery of the journey, which lasted six days, the missed coaches, the apprehension, are described in such a way that the whole account has the glamour of fiction combined with the truth of experienced fact. And here, as whenever he appears on the scene,

the figure of the General is one of the most attractive in the *Diary*. The return to France, passing from one allied camp to the other, re-entering by the permission and with the passports of foreigners, the realization that 'the King of France was only such, at that moment, through Blücher and Wellington'—all this is portrayed with profound feeling. The following paragraph is not the least instructive, though it is simple, unemotional description: 'Notwithstanding this complete victory over Buonaparte, the whole of the peasantry and common people, converse with them when or where or how I might during our route, with one accord avowed themselves utterly incredulous of his defeat. They all believed he had only given way in order that he might come forward with new forces to extirpate all opposers, and exalt himself on their ashes to permanent dominion.'

The last part of the *Diary* is even more condensed than the years in France, but it loses little or nothing in interest. Perhaps the two most prominent passages are those which describe Mme D'Arblay's narrow escape from drowning when she was caught by the tide at Ilfracombe—an admirable bit of writing—and her husband's death at Bath in 1820.[1]

But it is more than time we leave this record of her life, which lasted till 1840, for a consideration of her qualities as a writer. And here we must go back for a starting-point to Dr. Johnson's description of her as a 'character-monger'. It is as such that she excels. Her pictures of people, her power of bringing them to life, of making them speak, and of grouping them together are what primarily attract us in her letters and diary as in her novels. For her, plot is always subordinate—though probably she would not admit it. What interest her, and therefore her readers, are people, chiefly in their social life and amid everyday surroundings.[2] We get to know them as they

[1] *Op. cit.*, vol. iv, pp. 409–20 and pp. 430–9.

[2] Cf. *Early Diary*, ii, 145–7, Letter to Mr. Crisp, 1776 [Description of a party].

'Mr. Fitzgerald, a hard featured, tall, hard voiced, and hard mannered Irishman: fond of music, but fonder of *discussing* than of *listening*—as are many other people who shall be nameless. Miss Fitzgerald, his daughter, as droll a sort of piece of goods (to use your expression) as one might wish to know. She is good natured and sprightly, but so unlike other Misses of the present time that she is really diverting, for she speaks her mind as freely and readily before a room full of company, as if with only a single friend. She laughs louder than a man, pokes her head vehemently, dresses shockingly, and has a carriage the most *ungain* that ever was seen. . . . Mr. Nollekens, who is a jolly, fat, lisping, laughing, underbred, good-humoured man as lives: his merit seems pretty much confined to his profession and his language is as vulgar as his works are elegant. [He was a sculptor.] . . . Miss B. something—a sister-in-law of Mr. Hayes of the Pantheon: a young lady quite *à la mode*—every part of her dress, the very pink

appeared to their contemporaries, sometimes pretty intimately, more often rather superficially, and almost always from their speech, manners, and actions rather than from their thoughts and deeper motives. In the main it is a surface picture that we are given, and yet *picture* is perhaps the wrong word, for we seldom hear anything in detail of their appearance, and practically never anything of their dress, unless in the briefest references to sacque, or coat, or court feathers, or wig. This may be due to Fanny's short sight, which often leads her to ignore her friends, and causes her constant inconvenience. Be this as it may, though we become very well acquainted with many of her characters, it is almost always impossible to describe how they actually looked. But we know their mannerisms, habits, and talk; we know what they are interested in and who are their friends. It is because the real people of the *Diary* are described in precisely the same way as the imaginary people of the books, and because they are grouped in the same way and take part in the same sort of conversations or adventures, that the *Diary* is more fascinating even than the novels. The writer draws always upon her experience and observation: even her fiction is founded upon fact. Since she is an artist, she does not merely transcribe; she views reality through the medium of her own emotions and personality, and everything is coloured by her outlook. But it is reality that she depicts—not an idealized world or idealized or imaginary personages.

What is true of the characters is equally true of the incidents. In the main, the abnormal finds no place in the novels: when it does, e.g. in the suicide of Mr. Harrel or the heroics of Mrs. Delvile or her husband, the interest for the modern reader lies elsewhere. It may even be that the modern reader is sometimes inclined to stamp as abnormal, incidents and characters which were recognized in their own day as true to type. We know, for example, that Mrs. Thrale said her mother would have behaved precisely as did the Delviles, had there arisen any question of changing the family name. We know too that when doubts were once cast on the life-likeness of the miser, Mr. Briggs, a quiet little man, got up from the corner to insist that Mr. Briggs was

and extreme of the fashion—her (head) erect and stiff as any statue; her voice low, and delicate and mincing—her hair higher than twelve wigs stuck one on the other; her waist taper and pinched, evidently; her eyes cast languishingly from one object to another, and her conversation very much *the thing*. What was most pleasant, this fashionable lady came in with Miss Fitzgerald, who is so exactly her opposite that they could never be looked at without having the difference remarked.'

The method is the same as that employed in the description of Captain Meadows or Lady Louisa Larpent or Miss Larolles.

a portrait of himself. We might be led to question the authenticity of Captain Mirvan—and indeed the sea-captains of the day professed much indignation at the portrait. But in her *Diary* Fanny protests that he is not a whit exaggerated—that all the naval officers she knew hated the French and were given 'to roasting beaux and detesting old women'. If we find it difficult to believe in such episodes as the unfeeling wagers laid by society gentlemen on a race between old women, all over eighty; or in the cruel practical joke on Mme Duval, why, the eighteenth-century love of foolish wagers and of practical jokes is confirmed from other sources. Thus Tony Lumpkin plays a not altogether dissimilar trick on no less a person than his mother, and Mr. Hardcastle does not give him the chastisement he deserves, nor does any one, in the play or out of it, seem to regard the episode as entirely incredible. Manners have softened since Fanny D'Arblay's time; nowadays Sir Clement Willoughby and Lord Merton are less gross in their impertinences; Lady Louisa Larpent, Miss Larolles, and Captain Meadows have other methods of showing their 'tonnishness'. But that is not necessarily to say that their portraits are exaggerated, or even that they are heightened to ever so slight a degree. Set over against them the real people of the *Diary*,—Prince William and his manners to Mrs. Schwellenberg (not to mention Mrs. Schwellenberg herself); and the 'S.S.' of the Johnson passages; or compare 'Mr. Turbulent' with Mr. Twiss of the *Early Diary*; or 'Mr. Albany' of *Cecilia* with Mr. Hutton of the *Early Diary*, and it will be realized that the writer had some foundation upon which to build.

As a rule there is no question that scenes and characters and conversation come straight from the life lived around her by the people whom she knows by personal intercourse. From the time when she begins to write her early diary—dedicated, in a notable preface, to *Nobody*—she tries to dramatize her characters, to reproduce them and their conversation in a vivid way. Without trying, she enlivens them all by her shrewd wit and keen sense of the ridiculous; she 'theatricalizes the dialogue', as she puts it, and does so, at any rate in part, by the way in which she causes her characters to make 'themselves known by their own words'—the quality for which Burke praised her writings.

This was one of the new elements she introduced into fiction. There is nothing in Richardson or Fielding, Sterne or Smollett to equal her admirable conversation pieces. These differ from the conversations in Jane Austen's novels precisely in the degree in which Fanny Burney is inferior to her greater successor. In Jane Austen, every conversation, almost every sentence in it, contributes unobtrusively

not only to the development of the characters speaking, but also to the progress of the plot. In Fanny Burney, whose plots are less artistic in the details of their working-out, the conversations and incidents are more easily detached from the books in which they occur. They are entirely representative of the speakers, and of the scenes portrayed, but they are not related in so masterly a fashion to the general scheme of the story. Fanny Burney seems to conceive her scenes as scenes, rather than as parts of a whole. Perhaps this is one reason why she does not succeed in her various attempts as a dramatist.

On the other hand, even from the time of her first childish novel, she realizes one of the essential qualities of comedy whether in fiction or on the stage—the portrayal of contrasting social types. In that *History of Caroline Evelyn*, which she burnt at her step-mother's desire, the heroine was the daughter of a barmaid who had married a gentleman. Caroline was in turn brought up in refined surroundings and Fanny's imagination was haunted by the singular situations to which Caroline Evelyn's infant daughter must be exposed, from the unequal birth, by which she 'hung suspended between the elegant connexions of her mother and the vulgar ones of her grandmother'. The result of this conception was the gradual, irresistible growth of the history of *Evelina*, in which the interest depends on the 'unusual contrasts and mixtures of society'. But the interest of *Cecilia*, of *Camilla*, of the *Diary*, depends on precisely the same variety of character and scene.

As a writer of the novel of manners—or, as it is sometimes called, the tea-table novel—Fanny Burney was first in the field. She keeps some of the elements which are found in all the imitators of Richardson —the novelists

> Sniv'lling and driv'lling folly without end,
> Whose corresponding misses fill the ream
> With sentimental frippery and dream,
> Caught in a delicate soft silken net
> By some lewd earl, or rakehell baronet.
> (Cowper, *Progress of Error.*)

But even where the elements are similar, they are used in a way altogether different. In the *Diary* and in *Evelina*, whatever may have been the case later on, Fanny Burney writes primarily to amuse herself or her sister. Consequently she writes from her own point of view, and in the main about ordinary middle-class life and society and the things which interest quite ordinary young ladies. The shopping expedition (*Letter X*) in *Evelina* is typical. No one had thought of introducing such commonplaces into literature before: who could be interested in a girl's sensations when she first had her hair 'dressed', i. e. powdered, for a dance ; or when she quaked at her first introduction

to society, or made the ignorant mistakes of a country miss and suffered their awkward consequences? Yet precisely these trivial details with which almost every contemporary reader was familiar, took the world by storm, and interested not merely the girls who were Evelina's or Cecilia's coevals, but men like Johnson, or Burke, or Reynolds. The writing down of these trivialities marks a new era in the history of the novel, a new genre in fiction altogether. If the essays of Steele and Addison first emphasized the dignity of simplicity and called attention to the artistic possibilities as well as the moral beauty of domestic life, it remained for Fanny Burney to unite, by a thread of plot, the filaments of description and to produce the first novels of manners.

Her unsophisticated, unselfconscious writing added something else, which Steele and Addison, in the nature of things, could not have given, namely the feminine point of view. Just because she has no desire to ape her betters or to be anything but herself, she hits upon the remarkable discovery that not only women like to hear about themselves and their foibles and their interests, but that the picture of the woman's outlook is also immensely interesting and possibly even more revealing to the men who have hitherto had to be content with what can be observed or divined by themselves of the other sex. Perhaps they also enjoyed the novel experience in those days of hearing what girls and women thought of the lords of creation. It is true that the ideal Lord Orville is as little convincing as Sir Charles Grandison himself; but many girls have dreamed of just such heroes, just as they have resented the patronizing impertinences of conceited young men like Sir Clement who do them the favour of bestowing unwelcome attention upon them. It was a salutary thing, especially when young ladies were more humble and tongue-tied than they are at present, that some one should be bold enough to put their thoughts into words, and should do it with so much wit and so much good humour that there was no chance of giving offence.

For the reader of to-day the interest is slightly different in kind. He too revels in the characterization, in its vivacity, wittiness, and truth. But even more he delights in the pictures of other times and other fashions. Who else will transport him with so little trouble to Ranelagh, or Vauxhall, or the Pantheon, to a masquerade or a ridotto? Where else can he so easily move from scene to scene of a world long since vanished and forgotten? Diary and novels are alive with incident and drama, and, in the diary at any rate, comedy and tragedy jostle one another as they do in real life. Historical scenes merge into society conversations; kings and princesses yield to pages and footmen, Johnson and Burke are succeeded by Mme de Stäel and

Chateaubriand. The canvas is very full, but every portrait, even the lightest sketch, is of interest, and how inimitable is the picture of the society that is presented.

Among the characters who interest us, there is one of whom it is necessary to speak somewhat more in detail, before we leave her—of the author herself. Never surely has any one revealed herself more fully in her writings, nor by that revelation put her readers so closely in touch with the ideas and manners of a past generation. The *Diary* is intensely egotistical—that is part of its charm, and there is nothing petty or vainglorious in the outpourings which were meant not for the world at large, but for three or four intimate friends and relatives.

Fanny Burney's self-portrait depicts for us an extremely diffident and retiring girl, who develops gradually, and in spite of extraordinary literary success, into a modest, affectionate, self-effacing, but extremely competent woman, with plenty of common sense and power of judgement in the ordinary as in the many unusual situations of her life. Like her own Evelina, she suffers from (or, according to one's point of view, rejoices in) the extreme 'sensibility'[1] which was one of the attributes of refined women in her youth. She is easily abashed by disapproval; utterly cast down with little or no reason; she cares perhaps too much for adverse criticism; is too easily in 'raptures' and inclined to gush. Twentieth-century readers find her extravagance in feeling somewhat trying; there is a good deal of false sentiment and senseless emotion about herself as well as her heroines, and her over-delicacy awakens no kindred sympathy in ourselves. But changes of manners account for everything that is unattractive, and if we are to understand not only Fanny Burney, and Evelina, and Cecilia, but also Clarissa, Sophia, Amelia, and other eighteenth-century heroines, it is essential that we shall realize that this 'sensibility', exaggerated though we may think it, was a real attribute and an admired attribute of the women of their time. Again, the best of them were somewhat of prudes, and if Fanny's prudishness was remarkable, even in her own generation, there was yet nothing small-minded or uncharitable about it. From that she was saved by two qualities which are noteworthy in all her thoughts and writings—her hatred of affectation and her lively and unrestrained sense of fun. The saving grace of humour, combined with a very genuine humility, protected her alike from the cant of virtue and the megalomania which might have been induced by the almost overwhelming compliments and flattery to which she was subjected. She has been accused of vanity because she enjoyed and

[1] 'Sensibility' 'is continually extracting the excess of misery or delight from every surrounding circumstance'. *Mysteries of Udolpho*, ch. viii. See the whole passage.

repeated those compliments, but she would have been more than human had she not been delighted by the universal praise which she received. To hear that Gibbon had read *Evelina* at a sitting, that Burke could not lay down *Cecilia*, that Reynolds put his paint-brushes aside to enjoy her writings, that Johnson compared her with his favourite Richardson and placed her above Fielding, that her father and friends, the King and Queen, all England indeed, united in her praise—how could she know this and be totally unmoved? That she knew and valued her popularity and nevertheless showed no sign of losing her head or exaggerating her own importance is surely rather in her favour than the reverse. That she repeated the compliments she received—often laughing at their high-flown nature, or pointing out the critical incapacity of the persons who paid them, though with a due sense of the honour shown her by those whose good opinion was valuable and valued—all this seems only natural and attractive when we remember that she was writing for her father or sister.

Nor, in estimating her personal worth, must we forget her just discrimination between what is trivial and what is of importance in human character. Fanny Burney genuinely admired virtue and goodness, and had a high standard of conduct for herself as for others. In poverty, sickness, and adversity, as well as in prosperity, she kept the even tenor of her way, devoted to her family and friends, generous in word as in deed, and free from any trace of presuming upon her reputation. Her friends were innumerable in her lifetime; they were of both sexes and of all ages, and they were drawn from every rank of society. She had, indeed, a positive genius for friendship, and this survives her, for no reader of her *Diary* can lay it down without having developed a real and lasting affection for the writer.

APPENDIX

The following autograph letters and scraps preserved among Henry Crabb Robinson's papers at Dr. Williams's Library, Gordon Square, London, and, as far as I know, hitherto unpublished, are of interest. Crabb Robinson probably obtained them from his American correspondent, Dr. Sprague, an ardent collector of autographs, to whom he sent letters and signatures of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, and other of his literary acquaintances. Sprague, in return, gave him autographs of Woolman, Benjamin Franklin, and other well-known people. Possibly these notes of Fanny Burney and Mrs. Thrale came into his possession in the same way. Or it may be that they were given him by Fanny's younger sister, Miss S. H. Burney, with whom he became intimate in 1829, when he was in Italy. Many delightful letters of hers are preserved among his papers, and she may have given him these as well. Crabb Robinson did not systematically collect autographs, but he constantly presented his acquaintances with those of the notabilities who corresponded with him.

i. Fanny Burney to Mrs. Thrale. No. 98 in the 1864-7 volume of H. C. R.'s correspondence.
ii. Fanny Burney to Mrs. Thrale. No. 99 in the same volume.
iii. Mrs. Thrale to Fanny Burney. 1780. No. 21 in the 1725-99 volume.
iv. Mrs. Thrale to Fanny Burney. Feb. 13, 1781 (a scrap). No. 20 in the same volume.

i. *Fanny Burney to Mrs Thrale.* N.D.

How vexed am I, dearest Madam, at this account of you,—yet how sweet in you to tell me thus *all & about you* when I cannot come to see & hear!—& I do *long* so to be with you!—& yet *Copy* I have none,—not enough to *hang together* for a reading worth beginning. & I am doubly sorry, for you are just in the way to make such sort of trash read to most advantage. I now repent my half compliance with Mrs Ord—yet having failed her on Sunday, & gone to *you*, I was willing to try on Friday to *split the difference*, to make use of an elegant phrase, which may serve to *soften the rigour* of *My Literatureship*. Oh they do well that play tricks with my dear Mrs Thrale!—to be sure she never smokes them! *to be sure* she doubts I love Mrs Ord *so* much the more for having thus taken to you! & indeed she has *very* seriously. And she is quite grateful for your being pleased with it. She, too, has a large party for Friday, [but I? (seal)] shall run away as soon as I possibly can: I mean if you have given leave for my going at all, which I yet know not. How grieved I am about this Law Business! & how I hate this impracticable Lady!—I had rather any thing, almost, than see you involved in such quarrels:—o that the *Salute* had but taken place! Your Dream is now worth nothing. God bless you, my sweetest Mrs Thrale, & pray be well,—I am all of your Tit's mind, for I think we are all put to the *route* when you are sick: & nobody—not even she will be, or can be more sorry for the cause than your ever truly affectionate F.B.

Ha, Ha! Ha! poor Mrs Nominative!
admirable Mrs Byron.

Address: Mrs Thrale.
Endorsed (by H.C.R.): Mad: d'Arblay
(Autograph)
To Mrs Thrale.

ii. *Fanny Burney to Mrs. Thrale.* N.D.

Tuesday.

Ah, Dearest Madam, *Alive*—& yet not with you!—as soon as I proposed my Scheme of going to the Borough, every one called out you were doubtless at Streatham;—I know not why I had concluded the contrary, for *Home* would serve for either,—but I read your Letter too eagerly for much reflection, & I answered it in a hurry of joy that you were so near, when my disappointment by the Post had made me apprehend nothing but calamity & distance,—& so, in short, if I have made the mistake, I must suffer for it! which indeed I do very severely in knowing our Meeting, if you are in the Country, no longer depends upon myself. Instead of myself, William goes now to the Borough, to bring me word how matters really are.

If, then, Streatham is the place, will you, when your Horses are returned and rested, let me come to you for 2 or 3 Days? More, as I have been at Home but a *Fortnight* of the promised *4 Months*, I dare not propose here,—& less would give me no satisfaction.

Adieu, Dearest Madam,—I shall still be in some doubt till the Man returns whether I may not this very Morning have the happiness of seeing you.

Address: Mrs Thrale.
Endorsed (by H.C.R.): Madam d'Arblay
(Autograph)
to Mrs Thrale.

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iii. *Mrs. Thrale to Fanny Burney.*

As I went home Yesterday I stop'd to read Hayley's Poem at Robson's, & to look what he said of my Tyo; tis a strange Work, but seems to have many sparkling Beauties in it: the Compliment to Evelina is pretty † & helps make one wish well to the Book, of which the Length seems the most objectible [*sic*] Part—for who can read six Cantos so, all about nothing!

You must wrap yourself up carefully to morrow, or this Weather may give you cold; I will call by ten o'clock to be sure, & you must dine here on Saturday. Miss Owen is not come yet,—we go to the Cholmley's to night, yesterday Eveng was uncomfortable enough. Lord Ferrers's House was full of People I did not know—& nothing will cure me of my Hesitation in Company of y^e^ Bishop of Chester.[1] The S.S.[2] has no such Sensations, she was there in all her Glory pretty Dear!

My Master is at this moment solliciting M^r^ Adair to go with us to Spa and Italy; poor Soul! what a Rage he has for the Continent! What can be the meaning of so wild yet so constant a Desire?

To morrow's Teste a Tête will produce us some chat about these Continental Schemes; I am glad to hear that a *home* Project is thought on for Dick. We are all safest here I believe. Your Father will grieve at the bad News, but I always rejoyce to see him; so Adieu my loveliest my sweetest Tyo, and now if you wonder what I would sit down to write for when I had 500 other things to do, remember it was for the sake of saying how affectionately I am Yr H. L. T.

Address: Miss Burney
St Martins Street
Leicester Fields.
Endorsed by H.C.R.: 1780
M^rs^ Thrale to
Miss Burney
(autograph).

† Sweet Evelina's fascinating power
Had first beguil'd of Rest her sleeping hour.—*Triumphs of Temper.*

iv. *Mrs. Thrale to Fanny Burney.*

[Feb. 13, 1781.]

. . . works at us pretty hard—it is a new Lounging house for him, all the World comes to morrow; adieu sweetest, & give my best Regards to M^r^ Crisp who deserves all one's Esteem & a kind word to everybody whose kindness increases the comforts of my lovely Burney.

[No signature]
Address: Miss Burney
Chessington
near Kingston
Surry

Endorsed by H.C.R.: 13 Feb. 81.

[1] Beilby Porteus, B. of Chester, 1776-87. He was translated to London in the latter year. Thackeray laughs at him in *The Four Georges* for his extravagant praise of George II. He was a great opponent of French Revolutionary principles and described Paine's *Age of Reason* as 'rendering irreligion easy to the meanest capacity'.

[2] Sophia Streatfield, famous in Mrs. Thrale's circle for her ability to cry whenever asked to do so.

THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Pamphlet No. 62

Ruskin (and others) on Byron

By

R. W. Chambers, D.Litt.

November, 1925

. . . the sickliest of recorded ages, when British literature lay all puking and sprawling in Byronism. . . .

CARLYLE, *Sir Walter Scott.*

. . . *Don Juan,* where the wit and colour and power served to make an anti-social and licentious sentiment attractive to puny creatures, who were thankful to have their lasciviousness so gaily adorned. As for Great Britain, she deserved *Don Juan.* . . .

JOHN MORLEY, *Byron.*

An age such as was this one . . . was in sore need of healing. Perhaps more in need of healing than any other in the world's history. . . .

MRS. CAMPBELL, *Shelley and the Unromantics.*

But these were merciful men.

Ecclesiasticus, xliv, 10.

RUSKIN (AND OTHERS) ON BYRON[1]

Throughout the whole of that long period of the nineteenth century, during which the reputation of Byron was steadily sinking, Ruskin was his warmest champion.

Such other defenders as Byron had during this period were often defending, not Byron, but Byron's politics. Their championship may in the long run do Byron actual disservice. For the politics of the early nineteenth century have passed into history, and may lead us to forget that Byron's poetry is a living thing, by no means to be studied merely from the historical standpoint. On the other hand, to ignore politics altogether is impossible when dealing with the greatest of English political satirists: the statesmanship of Byron remains a subject on which, in the words of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, 'some thought will be usefully expended'.

Now, although the thing that attracts Ruskin most in Byron is exactly Byron's treatment of state affairs, nevertheless Ruskin is not attracted from the party point of view, but by the things which are independent of party, and independent of time. He is attracted because he sees in the verse which Byron wrote on political matters such things as humanity, sincerity, courage, and, far above all, poetry. Thus Ruskin is not only one of a small minority of defenders of Byron, but his defence is in striking contrast to that of some of his most eminent comrades in that minority.

In the first place, compare Ruskin's championship with the growth of nineteenth-century depreciation. At the time of Byron's death, most people, however unwillingly, believed in his power. The young Carlyle wrote that 'the noblest spirit in Europe' had sunk. Only nine years later Carlyle is thundering 'Close thy Byron: open thy Goethe'. But people were still reading their Byron, as this very command shows. Another ten years, and Thackeray attacks Byron, but he admits that in doing so he is 'denying the public gods'. In the course of a journey from Cornhill to Cairo, Michael Angelo Titmarsh arrives at Athens. The ancient glories of Athens do not

[1] For some very helpful criticisms I have to thank Prof. Grierson, who was in the chair when this paper was read to the Edinburgh Branch of the English Association (Dec. 4, 1925), and Prof. George Gordon, who has been good enough to look through the proof-sheets.

kindle him, and he has a contempt for the poor modern kingdom. He cannot tolerate Byron's eye for exotic beauty :

> Lord Byron wrote more cant of this sort than any poet I know of. Think of 'the peasant girls with dark blue eyes' of the Rhine—the brown-faced, flat-nosed, thick-lipped, dirty wenches ! Think of 'filling high a cup of Samian wine'; small beer is nectar compared to it, and Byron himself always drank gin. That man never wrote from his heart. He got up rapture and enthusiasm with an eye to the public. . . . The Great Public admires Greece and Byron. . . . Well, woe be to the man who denies the public gods !

This was written in 1845. We may perhaps reckon the middle of the century as the date when the tide turned : for in 1853 Charles Kingsley, when he ventures to defend Byron, feels that the public is against him. That does not deter the spirited and chivalrous Kingsley from wielding his bludgeon with all the reckless violence of a just man fighting a losing battle :

> What has put Byron out of favour with the public of late, is not his faults, but his excellences. His artistic good taste, his classical polish, his sound shrewd sense, his hatred of cant, his insight into humbug, above all, his shallow, pitiable habit of being always intelligible : these are the sins which condemn him in the eyes of a mesmerizing, table-turning, spirit-rapping, Spiritualizing, Romanizing generation. . . .

So, by the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, Byron's reputation had sunk to its lowest. Those, like Browning or Swinburne, who began by praising, ended by denouncing. Matthew Arnold's great defence of 1881 made many damaging concessions, but nevertheless it raised violent opposition, and gave rise to what has been described as a 'pogrom' against Byron.

Arnold's advocacy seems to Ruskin so lukewarm that he is driven to protest against his 'mangled misrepresentation'. And, indeed, mid-Victorian propriety seems to have prevented both Matthew Arnold and John Morley from doing justice to what are, after all, the greatest things Byron ever wrote. Arnold's selection from Byron's works, a selection running to nearly three hundred pages, omits the meeting of Michael and Satan before the gate of Heaven. Arnold seems to find the *Vision of Judgment* too blasphemous to be quoted, save for a few stanzas describing the government of George III—always a safe subject. Morley, we shall find, ignores the *Vision* and *Juan*, save for a passing allusion to their 'wit', although it is particularly as 'the poet of the Revolution' that he is considering Byron.

Now Ruskin is concerned with Byron as a poet and thinker, not with Byron as the representative of any particular trend of political thought.

In point of fact, the difference in 'political doctrine' between Byron and Ruskin is very marked. Byron is one of the earliest of English 'Liberals': indeed, the first example of 'Liberal' in the political sense which we find in the *Oxford Dictionary* is 'The Liberal, Verse and Prose from the South'.[1] Ruskin, when asked to define his political opinion, wrote, 'I hate all Liberalism as I do Beelzebub'.[2] Or, again, speaking of the absurdity of party politics, Ruskin says:

> Consider the ridiculousness of the division of parties into 'Liberal' and 'Conservative'. There is no opposition whatever between these two kinds of men. There is opposition between Liberals and Illiberals; that is to say, between people who desire liberty, and who dislike it. I am a violent Illiberal; but it does not follow that I must be a Conservative. A Conservative is a person who wishes to keep things as they are; and he is opposed to a Destructive, who wishes to destroy them, or to an Innovator, who wishes to alter them. Now, though I am an Illiberal, there are many things I should like to destroy. I should like to destroy most of the railroads in England, and all the railroads in Wales. I should like to destroy and rebuild the Houses of Parliament, the National Gallery, and the East end of London; and to destroy, without rebuilding, the new town of Edinburgh, the north suburb of Geneva, and the city of New York. Thus in many things I am the reverse of Conservative; nay, there are some long-established things which I hope to see changed before I die; but I want still to keep the fields of England green, and her cheeks red; and that girls should be taught to curtsey, and boys to take their hats off, when a Professor or otherwise dignified person passes by; and that Kings should keep their crowns on their heads, and Bishops their croziers in their hands; and should duly recognize the significance of the crown, and the use of the crook.[3]

The opposition could hardly be more absolute. Ruskin's defence has in it, therefore, nothing of party politics.

At the same time it was natural, indeed inevitable, that Byron's defenders should so largely have spoken from the party platform. For, till Byron's day, there had been a conspiracy among great English writers to ensure that the damned Whigs did not have the best of it. The Whigs had been satirized by Dryden; they had

[1] Although the terms 'Liberal' and 'Tory' were not at this date regarded as mutually exclusive.

[2] *Works*, xxxiv, 549.

[3] xxvii, 14.

been denounced by Johnson ('Dear Bathurst', said Johnson, 'was a man to my very heart's content: he hated a fool, and he hated a rogue, and he hated a Whig: he was a very good hater'). The circle of Pope was hostile. Swift and Burke, beginning as Whigs, lived to carry havoc into the camp of their friends. Addison's wish to be fair led him to lavish all his powers upon Sir Roger, so that the greatest Whig writer of the eighteenth century is remembered for having drawn the most noble picture ever made of the Tory country gentleman. This is as it should be: for the Whigs prided themselves on being more broad-minded than their adversaries: 'Tories own no argument but force, but Whigs admit no force save argument.' But from the party point of view it was bad business. The French Revolution seemed for the moment to redress matters; but very soon Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth were all safe in the opposite camp. Byron was the first to stand firm. Apostasy, he says, is fashionable, but 'I still retain my "buff and blue"'. (Buff and blue were the colours of the Whig Club of Charles James Fox—the tradition is retained to this day in the buff and blue of the *Edinburgh Review*.) Then, after Byron, we have the Whig tradition in English literature, eminent from many points of view, but especially in the field of History, both Political and Literary. Mid-Victorian Whigs and Liberals would have been the most ungrateful of men if they had not been prepared to defend Byron.

But mid-Victorian Liberalism was nothing if not proper: and Byron was nothing if not shocking. It was a difficult problem.

If the medieval axiom be true that 'a thing is known by its contraries', then we may know Ruskin's attitude by contrasting it with that of John Morley. Morley's *Essay* is the best example of the official 'progressive' defence of Byron. The defence begins by heralding Byron as 'the poet of the Revolution'. He is a shining exception to that profound antipathy to ideas usual in England, and above all to that 'hostility to generous aspirations' which characterizes the English aristocracy. So long as we can discourse of 'progress' and 'friends of progress', all is well: when we come to Byron, John Morley's troubles begin; and after about forty pages the horrid truth comes out—Byron wrote *Don Juan*. Still, his case is not hopeless; Byron also wrote highly regular dramas; there is *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice*, from which some fine blank verse passages can be instanced on 'freedom', and even passages showing that Byron 'was not dead to the beauty of domestic sentiment':

> The united tenderness and dignity of Faliero's words to Angiolina, before he goes to the meeting of the conspirators, would,

if there were nothing else, be enough to show how rightly in his better moods the poet appreciated the conditions of the family. Unfortunately the better moods were not fixed, and we had *Don Juan*, where the wit and colour and power served to make an anti-social and licentious sentiment attractive to puny creatures, who were thankful to have their lasciviousness so gaily adorned. As for Great Britain, she deserved *Don Juan*. A nation, whose disrespect for all ideas and aspirations that cannot be supported by a text, nor circulated by a religious tract society, was systematic, and where consequently the understanding was least protected against sensual sophisms, received no more than a just chastisement in 'the literature of Satan'. Here again, in the licence of this literature, we see the finger of the Revolution, and of that egoism which makes the passions of the individual his own law. Let us condemn and pass on, homily undelivered.[1]

And so, after further quotation from *Marino Faliero*, Morley closes his case for Byron.

You see the essence of the defence: it consists in an attack—an attack on the Great Britain of Byron's age. Byron's greatest poetry is ignored or repudiated: the *Vision of Judgment* ignored except for one passing allusion to its 'wit'; *Don Juan* deliberately rejected: 'condemn and pass on': terribly shocking—but the Great Britain of Byron's day deserved it.

Other apologists follow the same line. They represent the first thirty years of the nineteenth century as an age of black reaction and shameless apostasy, with a Tory government always in power; so that, against such a background, the figures of Byron and Shelley become, if not snow-white, at any rate only a rather pale grey. The advocates of Byron or the advocates of Shelley contrast their heroes with 'Southey the renegade'; with Coleridge 'wrecked in a mist of opium' (a variant is 'tottering through opium to Highgate'). Even Wordsworth does not escape:

> Just for a handful of silver he left us,
> Just for a riband to stick in his coat.

And so the 'friends of progress' retreat in good order, carrying off Byron and Shelley under cover of this fire directed upon the politics of the contemporaries of their heroes. (Much of the ammunition is drawn, by the way, from the arsenal of that *Don Juan* which John Morley will insist upon our condemning.) Unfortunately, at this moment the advocates of Shelley open an attack upon the 'lecherous', 'selfish' 'cad', Byron, whilst Byron's bodyguard retaliate upon the 'ineffectual', 'unsubstantial' Shelley. And so that

[1] John Morley, *Byron*, in *Critical Miscellanies*, 166.

noble company of early nineteenth-century poets, the most glorious group in all English literature, is treated like the family of a deceased Turkish sultan. All but one of the royal children must be strangled with the bowstring, in order that the undisputed succession of the Commander of the Faithful may be assured.

Professor Chew, in his recent survey of what has been written upon Byron—a book to which every student of Byron is indebted—speaks of Morley's *Essay* as 'the finest study of Byron that has ever been written'. And indeed, Morley's offensive-defensive, the attack upon the age of George III and George IV, has continued dominant to the present time. It is the same standpoint which is expressed by Mrs. Campbell in her recent study of Shelley, when she writes:

> And that Lamb should have been a drunkard, Coleridge an opium-eater, and Byron a libertine; that Wordsworth should have got so completely wearied out so early, and Keats have been so tremulous and hypersensitive that he at least laid himself open to the attacks of a mortal malady—all such things are symptoms of the age.

Mrs. Campbell has summed up this view in one telling phrase, when she speaks of Shelley withdrawing from England, after having 'tried in vain to cleanse the Georgian stables'. How very much alive this method of defending Byron and Shelley by contrasting contemporary England still is, you will realize when I quote the words of a professor who is very much alive, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch:

> I will ask you to consider this one point upon which some thought will be usefully expended, whether you apply it to the Europe of to-day, again staggering—blinded, almost broken—out of a stupendous war upon human liberty, or prefer to narrow it backwards down and upon an academic theme, 'The Romantic Revival in English Poetry'. If, and while, you so narrow it, I yet beg you to reflect that, of its pioneers, Coleridge tottered through opium to Highgate; Wordsworth, after a few glorious years, settled to live comfortably beside the cataracts of the Lake Country that had haunted him like a passion—and ended with Ecclesiastical Sonnets and Sonnets in Defence of Capital Punishment; Southey, the Pantisocrat, turned renegade and kept in long domesticity *his* home fires burning with duplicate proofs of articles betraying his old faith. But, of the ensuing rank of rebels, the great ones—Shelley, Keats, Landor, Byron—for various reasons found England no place for them, departed into exile, and in exile died. Let us weigh their names to-day against those of Frere, Castlereagh, Gifford, Lockhart, ask which were—after all and on the whole—in the right, and beware how *we* persecute for opinion.

Now, should respect for Byron or Shelley involve our thinking of Coleridge and Southey, under the Castlereagh administration, as an 'opium-eater' and a 'renegade', under the administration of a 'jackal'?

To the question which side was right, I would suggest the answer: 'At bottom, both: "It is not impossible that Truth may have more shapes than one."' Take the quarrel in its most extreme form: Byron and Shelley as against Castlereagh. In the autumn of 1818, Shelley was dreaming of the brotherhood of man, and beginning *Prometheus*; Byron, crusading against tyranny and war, was writing the *Dedication* to *Don Juan*, denouncing Castlereagh 'the tool', 'a bungler even in its disgusting trade'; and all the time, on the shores of Erie and Ontario, the war-sloops were being broken up, because Castlereagh and Monroe had laid peace on the Great Lakes which separate Canada from the United States, after negotiations among the most potent for good in all history.

It may be doubted whether we are helped to a correct understanding either of Byron or of (what after all is more important) the England of Byron's day, by the dictum of John Morley, that 'it is one of the singular facts in the history of literature' that Byron, the poet of the Revolution, was born in England, and an English aristocrat. The English aristocracy of Byron's day included a good many liberal Whigs and liberal Tories. It may be objected that the principles of these liberal patricians were not of the purest democratic type. But, for the matter of that, neither were those of Byron himself. It was Byron who, in 1821, spoke of democracy as the worst of all forms of government: 'for what is (in fact) democracy? an Aristocracy of Blackguards'.[1]

And, anyway, Byron did not depart into exile, and in exile die, because he was persecuted for opinion; surely he had too much courage to have found that England was no place for him, merely because his politics were not those of the majority. Is it not an injustice, both to him and to England, to imply this? Was not the England of Byron's day an aristocracy far too 'broad and strongly based' to have made a practice of persecuting its own members merely for eccentricities of opinion?

Let us look at the facts.

Byron's maiden speech in the House of Lords was directed against a cruel law which made the wrecking of machinery a capital crime. To realize the position, we must keep in mind the ferocity of the penal code which the nineteenth century had inherited from the

[1] *Letters and Journals*, v, 405–6.

eighteenth, and that a nation fighting a desperate war naturally tends rather to increase than to relax the severity of its discipline. All the more admirable therefore is Byron's opposition, in a noble speech:

> A mob may be better reduced to reason by a mixture of conciliation and firmness, than by additional irritation and redoubled penalties. Are we aware of our obligations to a mob? It is the mob that labour in your fields and serve in your houses—that man your navy and recruit your army—that have enabled you to defy all the world. . . .[1]

The speech received the welcome it deserved. Byron writes a week later:

> I have had many marvellous eulogies repeated to me since, in person and by proxy, from divers persons *ministerial*—yea, *ministerial*!—as well as oppositionists; of them I shall only mention Sir F. Burdett. *He* says it is the best speech by a *lord* since the '*Lord* knows when', probably from a fellow-feeling in the sentiments. Lord H[olland] tells me I shall beat them all if I persevere; and Lord G[renville] remarked that the construction of some of my periods are very like *Burke's*!! And so much for vanity. I spoke very violent sentences with a sort of modest impudence, abused everything and everybody, and put the Lord Chancellor very much out of humour: and if I may believe what I hear, have not lost any character by the experiment.[2]

Two days after this speech, *Childe Harold* appeared, with marked defiance of public opinion. It was a time when enthusiasm for our allies in the Peninsula had been stimulated by victory. Yet Byron tells us quite frankly how he loathes the Portuguese; he jeers at Scott's 'worthless lay', in which Beresford's victory at Albuera had been celebrated, and continues:

> Enough of Battle's minions! let them play
> Their game of lives, and barter breath for fame:
> Fame that will scarce reanimate their clay,
> Though thousands fall to deck some single name.
> In sooth 'twere sad to thwart their noble aim
> Who strike, blest hirelings! for their country's good,
> And die, that living might have proved her shame; . . .[3]

Yet this, and much more to the same tenor, was addressed to a nation 'convinced' (in Wordsworth's phrase) 'that the cause is the most righteous cause in which, since the opposition of the Greek Republics to the Persian invader at Thermopylae and Marathon, sword ever was drawn!'

I will not stop to ask who was in the right here; Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch seems himself to have answered the question when he

[1] *Letters and Journals*, ii, 428. [2] ii, 104. [3] i, 44.

speaks of Napoleon's wars as 'a stupendous war upon human liberty'. My point is that Byron awoke and found himself famous; *Childe Harold* went through five editions before the year was out; and Byron became the darling of society.

If Byron did not follow up his early successes in the House of Lords, it was not because he was 'persecuted for opinion'; it was, he himself tells us, owing partly to 'dissipation', and partly to 'haughty and reserved opinions'; that is, to a temperament which made him prone to be rather a critic of political life than an actor in it. This critical temperament naturally became emphasized when, after his quarrel with Lady Byron and his withdrawal from England, Byron 'simplified his politics into an utter detestation of all existing governments'.

Byron's temperament drove him into opposition. And we may be thankful that this was so; for only in opposition could his powers find full scope.

He is the greatest of English political satirists: and the gift of political satire is certainly not given to man in order that he may bolster up those in authority, and beat the under dog. A caricaturist ought to be in opposition. It is here that Byron has his great advantage over Dryden. Dryden, by instinct, sought for and respected authority, and, however he may conceal the fact, in *Absalom* and his other satires, Dryden is kicking the fallen. But Byron was born for opposition. So, it is quite consistent that, in his *Hours of Idleness*, he should have celebrated the memory of earlier Byrons who had held Newstead against the victorious party in the Civil Wars. So persistently is he in opposition that, if his enemies had been overthrown and revolutionary governments established in their place, he would soon have been attacking the new governors as vigorously as he had attacked the old. At least, so he says himself: 'I was born for opposition'—

> But then 't is mostly on the weaker side;
> So that I verily believe if they
> Who now are basking in their full-blown pride
> Were shaken down, and 'dogs had had their day',
> Though at the first I might perchance deride
> Their tumble, I should turn the other way
> And wax an ultra-royalist in Loyalty,
> Because I hate even democratic Royalty.[1]

Byron was, as Scott said, 'a patrician on principle', and 'the pleasure of displaying his wit and satire against individuals in office' had, Scott thought, much to do with his political views.

[1] *Don Juan*, xv, 23.

But we cannot all be patrician satirists in opposition. The world's work has got to be done. 'An utter detestation of all existing governments' is a splendid platform for a political caricaturist, but it is not so firm a foundation for the work of His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. So we must avoid the inference that, because Byron 'was born for opposition', therefore Castlereagh must have been in the wrong. 'Europe was staggering out of a stupendous war upon human liberty.' But surely the essential thing is, that the attack upon human liberty *was* defeated—and this had been due largely to Castlereagh: some historians say 'due to him more than to any other single man'.[1] It had required some courage to win that war: 'Napoleon could lose whole armies with impunity. . . . Five thousand British troops beaten and captured would have brought any British Minister's head perilously near to the block.'[2] For there was an Opposition, waiting to take bitter advantage of any slip ministers might make. Six days before Waterloo, Byron writes of the preparation Castlereagh was making to meet the emergency: 'C**h is preparing his head for the pike, on which we shall see it carried before he has done.'[3] And when the news of Waterloo came through, 'After an instant's pause, Lord Byron replied, "I am damned sorry for it"; and then, after another slight pause, he added, "I didn't know but I might live to see Lord Castlereagh's head on a pole. But I suppose I shan't now."'[4] After the Peace, Castlereagh worked incessantly for seven years; he defined his object as being 'to bring back the world to peaceful habits'. To him, admittedly, is largely due the fact that France was not trampled upon or dismembered: that the foundations were laid of peace in Europe for a generation, and of permanent peace with America and with France. 'Castlereagh undoubtedly gave up his life to the cause of international peace.'[5] In doing this he had, of course, to cultivate the friendship of many governments which Byron and his friends 'utterly detested'. He was a peacemaker who received from Shelley such beatitude as this:

> Let Fear and Disquiet and Strife
> Spread thy Couch in the chamber of Life!
> Marry Ruin, thou tyrant! and God be thy guide
> To the bed of the bride!

Every word of Shelley's awful curse came home. The storm of persistent hatred and persecution, the ever-present possibility of

[1] Webster, *Foreign Policy of Castlereagh*, 1925, p. 31.
[2] Fortescue, *British Statesmen of the Great War*, 1911, p. 278.
[3] *Letters and Journals*, iii, 205.
[4] Ticknor, *Life*, i, p. 60.
[5] Webster, 502.

assassination, the pressure of work, and a responsibility for the peace of Europe which, as he said, was 'more than he could bear'; these things did their work upon Castlereagh. As he was about to undertake the fresh responsibility of the conference of Verona, Wellington had to say, 'I am bound to warn you that you cannot be in your right mind'. Castlereagh covered his face with his hands and said, 'Since you say so, I fear it must be so'. It is one of the tragic scenes of history: ennobled by 'the simple strength and honesty of these two great men'.[1] After some days of sickness, Castlereagh, in a fit of delirium, took his own life. Friends of progress raised a cheer as his body was borne to burial, and Byron gloated over his suicide with a horrible glee in three epigrams which he published in the *Liberal*, and in a fourth, too filthy to be published anywhere.

Yes, by all means 'let us beware how we persecute for opinion'. But which was the persecutor, and which the persecuted?

Yet Byron was indisputably a humane man, and his relations with Scott show how chivalrous he could be in dealing with men of politics and temper different from his own. The truth is that Byron and Shelley misunderstood both Castlereagh and Southey. We owe the *Vision of Judgment* to Byron's misunderstanding of Southey, and therefore must say with the tolerant Kent, 'I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper'. But more profit is to be got out of thinking of Byron's friendship with Scott, based as it was upon mutual knowledge, than by giving historic value to his libels upon Castlereagh or Southey. Some of these libels are great literature, and some are not, but they are none of them a sound basis for history. Yet they have been repeated for a century, and are often repeated to-day by historians of literature; who, indeed, go farther. Byron had a deep admiration for the courage of Castlereagh,[2] however much, as in an Icelandic blood-feud, this genuine admiration was combined with relentless hatred. Defenders of Byron to-day call Castlereagh a 'jackal'.

I am sometimes reminded of the kind-hearted epicure who was worried when a humanitarian explained to him how a goose was made to suffer in the process of preparing *pâté de foie gras*. The epicure had an interview with his cook, and decided never to put the poor goose to this pain again, especially as his cook assured him that he could get an equally good *pâté* by subjecting two ducks to the same treatment. It is time some attention was paid to the persecution suffered by the Tory duck, as well as by the Liberal goose.

[1] Fortescue, *British Statesmen*, p. 271.

[2] *Letters and Journals*, iv, 282.

It is not only individuals, but a whole generation of Englishmen, who are wronged by the denunciation of the first thirty years of the nineteenth century as an age of base and mean ideals, rendering England no place for people like Byron or Shelley. Only when we have cleared away these misconceptions can we understand the relations of Ruskin, the child of a middle-class Tory home of this period, to Byron, its dominating figure.

During the recent war some people found comfort and support in Wordsworth's *Sonnets dedicated to Liberty*, or the Tract on the *Convention of Cintra*. Seldom has the heroic temper, as found among a people battling for liberty, been better stated. And the temper was widespread, at some moments, at least. Listen to Wordsworth, speaking of the expeditionary force departing to the Peninsula:

> That army had been sent upon a service which appealed so strongly to all that was human in the heart of the nation, that there was scarcely a gallant father of a family who had not his moments of regret that he was not a soldier by profession, which might have made it his duty to accompany it.

Our allies had been generously succoured. Here it is Byron, a grudging and hostile witness, who is speaking:

> When the Portuguese suffered under the retreat of the French, every arm [in Britain] was stretched out, every hand was opened, from the rich man's largess to the widow's mite, all was bestowed, to enable them to rebuild their villages and replenish their granaries.[1]

When the victory was won, it was the privilege of the British leaders to save France from dismemberment and ruin. Of course it was Britain's interest to be generous, but it was something to have statesmen with sufficient breadth and restraint to see this. Typical of this is the story of the excursion which, in 1815, Lord and Lady Castlereagh had arranged for some of the allied magnates in Paris. The ladies grew tired, and one of Castlereagh's young diplomatists was sent to a village in quest of donkeys. He returned defeated. Blücher nodded to an aide-de-camp, and soon three times the requisite number of donkeys appeared, driven by half a dozen Prussian hussars, and followed by the screaming population. Sir Walter Scott, who was one of the party, tells the tale:

> And an angry man was Blücher when Lord Castlereagh condescended to go among them, all smiles, and sent them back with more Napoleons than perhaps the fee-simple of the whole stud was worth.

[1] *Letters and Journals*, ii, 428.

France had been the 'natural enemy' of Britain for centuries: there had been two wars with America in one generation. Castlereagh placed our relations with both countries upon a footing of enduring peace which has lasted to our own day, and of which it is for this generation to make what use it will.

It is pleasant to think that when, this week, the Treaty of Locarno was signed at the Foreign Office, the portrait of Castlereagh was brought from the House of Lords, in order that the picture of the man who gave his life for the cause of peace in 1822 might look down upon the work of the pacificators of 1925.

Such achievements in war and peace are sufficient to entitle a generation to the gratitude of all posterity, had there been nothing else. But, in the midst of all this, England succeeded in carrying through the greatest reform in the history of the world. England abolished her own slave trade, and, since only international action could complete this reform, it became a main feature of English foreign policy to persuade other nations to do the same. How many of us realized that, in 1817, Castlereagh persuaded Spain to abolish the slave trade by a bribe of £400,000, and that the Commons footed the bill? This is one of the many things we learn from Professor Webster's illuminating volume.

I am not forgetting that, at the very time of the Abolition of Slavery, the Industrial Revolution was preparing new and horrible problems for humanitarians. But our gratitude to the English Abolitionists ought to be all the greater: for what would have been the plight of the world, if the Industrial Revolution had come upon it with the slave trade unchecked? And strangely enough, those who most bitterly attack the period of the 'Georgian Stables' lavish their most generous abuse upon Southey 'the renegade'—Southey 'betraying his old faith'—Southey 'who abandoned all the causes which he had once enthusiastically supported'. Yet Southey was the first of a little group of Tory humanitarians, who raised a constant protest against the horrors of the Industrial Revolution.[1] To this group Wordsworth too belongs: '*Right of a human Creature to be exempt from being considered as a mere Instrument. The condition of multi-*

[1] There were, of course, other protesters. But the importance of Southey is emphasized alike by our own constitutional historian, and by the thoroughgoing German socialist. Compare Dicey, *Law and Opinion in England*, Sec. ed., 1914, pp. 223–5, with Max Beer, *History of British Socialism*, 1919, Vol. i, *passim*. 'Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey became, in the course of time, the spiritual leaders of the new conservatism, imbuing it with a sense of social righteousness and love of the people. They are the fathers of the Tory Democracy and Christian social reform' (Beer, i, 122).

tudes deplored from want of due respect to this truth on the part of their superiors in society. Earnest wish expressed for a System of National Education established universally by Government. Glorious effects of this foretold.' The value of some of these topics as poetry may be open to dispute, but as a programme for social reform in 1814 they need no defence.

The age was one of steadily growing humanitarianism, as is proved by the mitigation, during the reign of George IV, of the horrors of the earlier Criminal Law. If we are to judge it by its favourite literature, it was the age of the Waverley Novels, and the age which was gradually coming to the conclusion (in spite of Byron's opposition) that Wordsworth was one of the greatest of all English poets. Such an age cannot have been an age of base ideals. As to *Don Juan*, it is rather hard to judge an age by a satire upon it. But take *Don Juan*. When Juan's fortunes reach their lowest ebb, and he is exposed for sale in the slave-market of Constantinople, he meets there—his fellow in distress—his first English acquaintance, the soldier of fortune Johnson, with 'an English look' and

With resolution in his dark grey eye,

cool, unconquerable, humorously cheerful, compassionate, reckless concerning his own fate:

But seeing at his elbow a mere lad,
Of a high spirit evidently, though
At present weighed down by a doom which had
O'erthrown even men, he soon began to show
A kind of blunt compassion for the sad
Lot of so young a partner in the woe,
Which for himself he seemed to deem no worse
Than any other scrape, a thing of course.

'My boy', said he, 'amidst this motley crew
Of Georgians, Russians, Nubians, and what not,
All ragamuffins, differing but in hue,
With whom it is our luck to cast our lot,
The only gentlemen seem I and you;
So let us be acquainted, as we ought:
If it could yield you any consolation
'T would give me pleasure.—Pray, what is your nation?'[1]

And so, when Juan hints his story, he gives him a rough comfort:

'And these are things which ask a tender tear,
Such as I, too, would shed if in your place:
I cried upon my first wife's dying day,
And also when my second ran away;

[1] v, 12, seq.

'My third'—'Your third!' quoth Juan, turning round,
'You scarcely can be thirty: have you three?'
'No—only two at present above ground:
Surely 'tis nothing wonderful to see
One person thrice in holy wedlock bound!'
'Well then, your third', said Juan, 'what did she?
She did not run away too—did she, sir?'
'No faith'—'What then?' 'I ran away from her.'

Johnson may be a bigamist and a wife deserter. But a better story of a friend in need was never told.

Later Juan comes to England:

Besides (alas! his taste—forgive and pity!)
At *first* he did not think the women pretty.

I say at *first*—for he found out at *last*,
But by degrees, that they were fairer far
Than the more glowing dames whose lot is cast
Beneath the influence of the Eastern star.[1]

Let this be the reply to Thackeray's maledictions.

And then there comes the picture of Aurora Raby:

Juan knew nought of such a character
High, yet resembling not his lost Haidée. . . .

We must not overlook these passages, where the exiled satirist becomes enthusiastic at the thought of his countrymen and countrywomen. We expect him to curse, and we find him, like Balaam on the top of Peor, 'altogether blessing'.

If we prefer to judge the age from a quieter satirist than Byron—take Jane Austen. The age of Jane Austen can score some points, I submit, when we compare it with the age of Fielding or of Smollett, to say nothing of that of Wycherley and Etheredge. Byron bears witness to the change:

There now are no Squire Westerns as of old,
And our Sophias are not so emphatic.

Instead, we have women like Emma Woodhouse, and efficient, conscientious country gentlemen like Mr. Knightley. When Juan first lands in England, and rolls along the smooth turnpike road, the face of the country is no less glorious than the character of some of its women turns out to be later:

On! on! through meadows, managed like a garden,
A paradise of hops and high production.

[1] xii, 68.

Mr. Knightley of Donwell Abbey, and his brother John Knightley of Brunswick Square, are types of the country gentleman and man of affairs, to whose ability and industry we owe it that the country had survived the economic struggle with Napoleon.

And mention of Brunswick Square reminds us of another man who lived there, till he moved to Herne Hill—Mr. John James Ruskin, engaged upon building up a business in sherry, and with the help of his wife bringing up an only son in the hope that he would end as a bishop, if not an archbishop, of the Established Church. At the age of twelve, discipline was so far relaxed that young Ruskin was allowed to drink wine, taken to the theatre, and began to have dinner with his father and mother: at dessert his father would read some favourite book, 'at last, the shipwreck in *Don Juan*—of which, finding me rightly appreciative, my father went on with nearly all the rest. I recollect that he and my mother looked across the table at each other with something of alarm, when, on asking me, a few *festas* afterwards, what we should have for after-dinner reading, I instantly answered "Juan and Haidée". My selection was not adopted. . . . But by the end of . . . 1834 [when Ruskin was fifteen] I knew my Byron pretty well all through.'[1] . . .

So among the 'puny creatures, who were thankful to have their lasciviousness so gaily adorned', we must number Mr. and Mrs. John James Ruskin and their boy of twelve.

The pious Tory household of 1830 'deserved its *Don Juan*', I think, better than the enlightened Liberal of 1870. At any rate the Ruskins knew better how to use *Don Juan*. That Byron should be such a favourite in the Ruskin family is a curious commentary upon that connexion between Byron and Evangelicalism which Professor Grierson has emphasized. One of the many points of sympathy between Ruskin and Byron lies in the intimate knowledge of the Old Testament which each possessed. They had both been through and through[2] it before they were eight years old: and that left its permanent mark, in spite of all later changes.

Anyway, Ruskin was brought up on the Bible and Byron, and 'my mother', he says, 'was no more afraid of my turning out a corsair or a Giaour than a—Solomon'.

I am not pretending that Byron was the favourite reading of every

[1] xxxv, 142.

[2] Byron says 'through and through' (*Letters and Journals*, vol. v, p. 391). Ruskin's mother took him 'at least six times straight through the Bible', *Præterita*, 164.

strict Evangelical about 1830; on the contrary, Ruskin soon had the powerful stimulus of opposition to confirm him in his love of Byron. Ruskin was sent to be taught by the Rev. Thomas Dale (afterwards Dean Dale). I have the strongest reasons for not speaking disrespectfully of the Rev. Thomas Dale, for he was the first Professor of English in University College, London (and indeed in England). He subsequently migrated to King's College: there Ruskin became his pupil. The kind of teaching Dale gave about Byron may be gathered from the text-book he edited for the use of his pupils:[1]

> Byron . . . is doomed to be exiled from the libraries of all virtuous men. It is a blessing to the world that what is putrid must soon pass away. The carcase hung in chains will be gazed at for a short time in horror: but men will soon turn their eyes away, and remove even the gallows on which it swung.

Having warned his students not to read Byron, the professor seems then to have set them to write an essay. The essay which Ruskin wrote for him on *Fiction* is still extant. I have never met with a better instance of the undergraduate pulling his professor's leg: or if I have, it has been wasted upon me.

Ruskin praises Byron as the most universal of poets. He is excelled by Milton and Homer only in the vastness of their epic imaginations:

> There is not, there cannot be, a human being 'of soul so dead' as not to feel that he is a better man, that his ideas are higher, his heart purer, his feelings nobler, his spirit less bound by his body, after feeding on such poetry. But our enthusiasm has drawn us into a false inference. There *are* animals who neither have felt this inspiration themselves nor believe that others can feel it. . . . They actually appear to imagine that *they! they!!* yes *they!!!* will be able to wipe away his memory from the earth. . . . Who does not feel indignation mingled with his scorn of these Grub Street reptiles, even although the dust of a single year will overwhelm them for ever, and the impotence of their life be equalled by the oblivion of their death![2]

It may be that the professor did not read his pupil's essay; it may be that he did not know what comment to make if he should return it. Such things have happened, at any rate, to his successor. Anyway he kept the essay in his desk. Fifty-seven years later it was unearthed from that desk by the professor's granddaughter, and

[1] *The Students' Guide*, by the Rev. John Todd, revised by the Rev. Thomas Dale. See Ruskin, *Works*, i, 357.

[2] i, 375.

published, with Ruskin's permission. It was thus the last of Ruskin's statements about Byron to be published, though the first to be written. It is astonishing how closely parallel this boyish essay is to the mature statement Ruskin made forty-four years afterwards in *Fiction, Fair and Foul.*

When a boy, Ruskin had resolved that Byron should be his master in verse; and Byron *is* his master, though not in verse. Byron's *Don Juan* and Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* are alike in this: they are periodic addresses to the nation on whatever topic the spirit might dictate: addresses to a nation quite unconvinced and largely hostile —manifestoes like those of the Hebrew prophets. The position of prophet is a trying one, but Ruskin finds comfort in the woes of his predecessor. In 1870 Morley had written that 'for no Englishman now does Byron hold the highest place'—the place of 'the author to whom we turn at all moments for inspiration and encouragement'. Now this is precisely the place which Byron does occupy for Ruskin, and more emphatically than ever in the year 1880, when he wrote *Fiction, Fair and Foul.*

For fully twenty years Ruskin had been moved by that 'volcanic instinct of justice' which he recognized as the motive power of himself, of Byron, and of very few others: 'conviction that about ninety-nine hundredths of whatever at present is, is wrong, conviction making us . . . declarers of political doctrine monstrous to the ears of mercenary mankind'. Ruskin had published *Unto this Last* in the *Cornhill*, and was condemned as 'a babbler, a fanatic, and a heretic', till Thackeray, the editor, had to tell him that his articles were so unanimously condemned and disliked that he could only admit one more.[1] Froude had given him another chance in *Fraser's Magazine*, where *Munera Pulveris* appeared. Again universal condemnation of his 'hopeless rubbish', and when the fourth number appeared Ruskin had been again gagged: even his father had disapproved. Again and again Ruskin had preached to an unheeding generation. Then he began the periodical publication of that colossal protest *Fors Clavigera*: kept it up unaided for seven years, till he broke down under the strain in 1878: steadied himself, and continued his war with the world in 1880. All this had been done in the midst of private and personal griefs, till his 'conclusive' sorrow brought, as Carlyle noted, 'thick quiet despair on the personal question' which made him determined 'to go ahead all the more with fire and sword on the universal one'.[2]

And so, in 1880, Ruskin turns for encouragement to Byron, admiring the way Byron stands up in the face of a 'mercenary

[1] Collingwood, 156.

[2] *New Letters*, 1904, ii, 293.

mankind', refusing to be cowed, browbeaten, or silenced; refusing to despair either of himself or of the republic. It is this which makes *Don Juan* one of the heroic things in English literature, ranking with the *Battle of Maldon* or *Samson Agonistes*. Byron was thinking of himself when at the outset he described how poor Don José was brought low by his own frailties, and by a wife addicted to mathematics:

> Whate'er might be his worthlessness or worth,
> Poor fellow! he had many things to wound him.
> Let's own—since it can do no good on earth—
> It was a trying moment that which found him
> Standing alone beside his desolate hearth,
> Where all his household gods lay shivered round him:
> No choice was left his feelings or his pride,
> Save Death or Doctors' Commons—so he died.[1]

Byron had stood with his household gods shivered, with 'deliberate desolation piled upon him', overwhelmed with remorse, and with the whole nation crying shame. But he did not die. He faced his enemies like this:

> Dogs, or men! for I flatter you in saying
> That ye are dogs—your betters far—ye may
> Read, or read not, what I am now essaying
> To show ye what ye are in every way.
> As little as the moon stops for the baying
> Of wolves, will the bright Muse withdraw one ray
> From out her skies—then howl your idle wrath!
> While still she silvers o'er your gloomy path.[2]

Or again:

> For I will teach, if possible, the stones
> To rise against Earth's tyrants.[3]

Or again:

> And I will war, at least in words (and—should
> My chance so happen—deeds), with all who war
> With Thought;—and of Thought's foes by far most rude,
> Tyrants and sycophants have been and are.
> I know not who may conquer: if I could
> Have such a prescience, it should be no bar
> To this my plain, sworn, downright detestation
> Of every despotism in every nation.[4]

[1] i 36. [2] vii, 7. [3] viii, 135. [4] ix, 24.

Secondly, Ruskin is attracted to Byron by his conviction of his sincerity:

> The first thing you have got to do, in reading Byron to purpose, is to remember his motto, 'Trust Byron'. You always may; and the more, that he takes some little pleasure at first in offending you. But all he says is true, nevertheless, though what worst of himself there is to tell, he insists upon at once; and what good there may be, mostly leaves you to find out. To the end of his life, he had a schoolboy's love of getting into mischief: and a general instinct for never doing anything he was bid; which extends up even as far as the Commandments themselves. But he never either recommends you to break them, or equivocates in the smallest degree to himself about what they *are*.[1]

The third, and the greatest, tie between Byron and Ruskin lay in their humanity. Both men could be cruel when their passions were roused, but few have had such a hatred of the infliction of pain.[2]

Scott, Byron, and Ruskin are the three greatest dog-lovers of English literature. Hence their sympathy. For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for one dog-lover to believe that another dog-lover could ever do anything very wrong. Every one knows the story of Byron's dogs, particularly of Boatswain, whose epitaph declares him to possess 'all the virtues of man without his vices'. Before Byron went abroad he arranged that he, his dog, and his old servant Joe Murray should rest in the same tomb. 'If I was sure his lordship would come here, I should like it well enough', said old Joe (perhaps fearing the rival claims of Westminster), 'but I should not like to be alone with the dog.' 'If Byron were only in Venice now,' wrote Ruskin in 1869, 'I think we should have got on with each other.'[3] Of course they would: they would have told each other dog stories, and Ruskin would have carried off Byron to the Scuola degli Schiavoni to inspect Carpaccio's picture of St. Jerome's dog 'watching his master translating the Bible, with highest complacency of approval',[4] 'though not, of course, understanding the full import of his master's literary work'.[5]

This sympathy between Ruskin and Byron makes Ruskin find in Byron what has been so often denied him (as e. g. by Morley), the power of hitting upon the 'chance epithet of telling felicity', or 'the phrase that opens to us hidden lights'. Here is Ruskin's praise of

[1] *Works*, xxxiv, 361. See also xxxvi, 574.

[2] It is worth remembering that in 1822 the first act against cruelty to animals was passed. In his humanity, as in other things, Byron belongs to his age.

[3] xxxvi, 574. [4] xxiv, 230. [5] xxix, 36.

a passage from a fine poem which has not many admirers, *The Island*:

> Some very wicked people—mutineers, in fact—have retired, misanthropically, into an unfrequented part of the country, and there find themselves safe indeed, but extremely thirsty. Whereupon Byron thus gives them to drink:
>
> A little stream came tumbling from the height
> And straggling into ocean as it might.
> Its bounding crystal frolicked in the ray
> And gushed from cliff to crag with saltless spray,
> Close on the wild wide ocean—yet as pure
> And fresh as Innocence; and more secure.
> Its silver torrent glittered o'er the deep
> As the shy chamois' eye o'erlooks the steep,
> While, far below, the vast and sullen swell
> Of Ocean's Alpine azure rose and fell.
>
> Now, I beg, with such authority as an old workman may take concerning his trade . . . to assure the reader that here *is* entirely first-rate literary work. Though Lucifer himself had written it, the thing is itself good, and not only so, but unsurpassably good, the closing line being probably the best concerning the sea yet written by the race of the sea-kings. I tell you this, mind you, in my old name and faculty of 'author of *Modern Painters*'—having looked at a waterfall or two in my time, and not unfrequently at a wave, and got some things fairly well said, though I say it, concerning both; and on such standing, or reclination, do farther certify you that neither I in my weakness, nor Byron in his might, could either of us have said one right word of these lovely and mighty things, but that we both of us had in our hearts reverence for the laws of God, and pity for the creatures of earth.[1]

Reverence for the laws of God, Byron may have had; pity for the creatures of earth he had, indisputably.

This humanity made both Ruskin and Byron resent what seemed like intentional cruelty towards themselves. But Byron was protected by his sense of humour:

> But I, the mildest, meekest of mankind
> Like Moses, or Melancthon, who have ne'er
> Done anything exceedingly unkind,—
> And (though I could not now and then forbear
> Following the bent of body or of mind)
> Have always had a tendency to spare,—
> Why do they call me Misanthrope? Because
> *They hate me, not I them*:—and here we'll pause.[2]

[1] xxxiv, 333.

[2] ix, 21.

Youth and reckless humour carried Byron on; but Ruskin, an older man, broke down under the strain of prophesying to an unconvinced generation. Another illness interrupted his study of Byron, and it remains, for ever, a fragment. But we may fall back upon his schoolboy Essay, with its declaration that Byron 'in the vastness of their epic imaginations' is surpassed by Milton and Homer alone.

In writing this sentence, Ruskin was no doubt thinking primarily of annoying the Rev. Dr. Dale. He may have been thinking of the great meeting of Michael and Satan before the gate of Heaven; that episode which Matthew Arnold did not venture to include in his Selections from Byron.

It was upon this passage that Ruskin in 1880 had proposed to dilate ('to examine what facts lie at the root of Byron's imagination of that contest between the powers of good and evil'). That promise he was never to carry out. But we can see how the humanity and the heroism of it attracted him—the humanity which is essential to the greatest things in heroic story, whether in an Icelandic Saga or in Homer:

> Priam, son of Dardanus, wondered at Achilles, how great he was and how goodly: for he was like unto the gods. And Achilles marvelled at Priam, son of Dardanus, beholding his noble bearing, and hearing his speech.

It may even be said that Byron succeeds where Milton fails. For whatever sympathy Milton may cause us to have for Satan, he will allow no such weakness to his archangels. So when Satan is brought face to face with Gabriel, Gabriel taunts him with the loss of Heaven, with the folly which has overthrown him, and finally calls him a liar.

> Gabriel . . . .
> Disdainfully, half smiling, thus replied:
> O loss of one in Heaven to judge of wise
> Since Satan fell, whom folly overthrew. . . .

Byron knew his Bible better, perhaps, than Milton. Anyway he knew that archangels do not behave like that: for 'Michael the archangel, when, contending with the Devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation'. But Byron's Michael shows much more than mere self-control, when, not the body of Moses, but the soul of George III is in dispute. The angelic caravan has brought the old man with an old

soul, both extremely blind, to the gate of Heaven, and seated him on a cloud:

> But bringing up the rear of this bright host
> A Spirit of a different aspect waved
> His wings, like thunder-clouds above some coast
> Whose barren beach with frequent wrecks is paved;
> His brow was like the deep when tempest-tossed;
> Fierce and unfathomable thoughts engraved
> Eternal wrath on his immortal face,
> And *where* he gazed a gloom pervaded space.
>
> As he drew near, he gazed upon the gate
> Ne'er to be entered more by him or Sin,
> With such a glance of supernatural hate,
> As made Saint Peter wish himself within;

Then the gate flies asunder:

> And from the gate thrown opened issued beaming
> A beautiful and mighty thing of Light,
> Radiant with glory, like a banner streaming
> Victorious from some world-o'erthrowing fight: . . .
>
> The Cherubs and the Saints bowed down before
> That arch-angelic Hierarch, the first
> Of Essences angelical who wore
> The aspect of a god; but this ne'er nursed
> Pride in his heavenly bosom, in whose core
> No thought, save for his Maker's service, durst
> Intrude, however glorified and high;
> He knew him but the Viceroy of the sky.
>
> He and the sombre, silent Spirit met—
> They knew each other both for good and ill;
> Such was their power, that neither could forget
> His former friend and future foe; but still
> There was a high, immortal, proud regret
> In either's eye, as if 'twere less their will
> Than destiny to make the eternal years
> Their date of war, and their 'Champ Clos' the spheres. . . .
>
> The spirits were in neutral space, before
> The gate of Heaven; like eastern thresholds is
> The place where Death's grand cause is argued o'er,
> And souls dispatched to that world or to this;
> And therefore Michael and the other wore
> A civil aspect: though they did not kiss,
> Yet still between his Darkness and his Brightness
> There passed a mutual glance of great politeness.

There are those who tell us that the twenty-fourth book of the *Iliad* was added by a later poet, who could not leave the story with Achilles and Priam unreconciled. To supplement Milton by depicting the courtesies of Michael and Satan was an adventure hardly

less high than to bring Achilles and Priam face to face. We can see why the boy Ruskin classed together Homer, Milton, and Byron, and how, throughout life, he was attracted by the humanity which made Michael bow to Satan 'not too low, but kindly'.

For indeed the age of Scott and Byron was an age of very noble humanity. A great historian has drawn our attention to the fact that the actual Helen Walker, the prototype of the imaginary Jeanie Deans, after having obtained the pardon for her sister, had to struggle back to Scotland on foot, and only just arrived in time to save her sister's life. It was impossible for Scott to tell the story so. That is some measure of the difference between the humanity of 1736 and of 1818. This humanity is the more noteworthy because fate had concentrated upon the age of Wordsworth, Scott, Byron, and Shelley two blows, more than usually demoralizing. It was bad enough that the high hopes of the French Revolution should have been frustrated. Wordsworth (and in great measure also the ordinary Englishman) 'believed that a benignant spirit was abroad; and the September massacres were the comment of destiny on that belief. He expected to see the power of the one or few abolished; and Napoleon arose to mock his expectations'.[1] When the clash resulting from the French Revolution had to be met at the same time as that resulting from the Agricultural and Industrial Revolution, brave men might well have quailed. To Bacon *philanthropia* had been a very simple thing: if learning could but be advanced, and inventions multiplied, the relief of man's estate must follow. That great philanthropist, Jonathan Swift, sees clearer: the King of Brobdingnag knows where to place a science which teaches impotent and grovelling mankind how to blow each other to the skies; still, that magnanimous monarch has no doubts as to agricultural improvements: the man who can make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, grow upon a spot where only one grew before—he is the true benefactor. In that faith the gentry of England had gone ahead. But by 1830 they were beginning to find that though two ears of corn were growing where one had grown before, and a hundred cotton shirts being made where one had been made before, it was not clear that men were either better fed or better clothed. Would-be benefactors of mankind had some excuse, if they grew peevish; even if at times they attacked each other, as Oliver in his mortal swoon struck Roland at Roncesvalles:

> li oil li sunt trublet
> Ne loinz ne pres ne poet vedeir si cler
> Que reconoisse nisun hume mortel.

[1] Raleigh, *Wordsworth*, p. 53.

When Macaulay, in 1830, made his violent onslaught on Southey, because Southey had attacked the way in which the Industrial Revolution was being conducted, both men were sincerely seeking the welfare of the whole nation.

A very real humanity marks all the great writers, and many at least of the great statesmen of the time. It marks Shelley with his passion for reforming mankind, and Wordsworth, alike in the more easy hopes of his youth, and in his later and humbler mood 'that was to seek comfort for itself from the old man on the moor'. It marks Keats, rejoicing over the dancing-class in Cumberland: 'There was as fine a row of boys and girls as you ever saw. I never felt so near the glory of Patriotism, the glory of making by any means a country happier. This is what I like better than scenery.' We see it in Byron, taking advantage of his independence to hazard everything for the sake of Greece; and not less in Castlereagh, sorrowfully admitting that he dare not 'endanger the fate of the present generation', and, for the sake of Greece, risk another European war. We see it in the magnificent charity of Scott, friend alike of Castlereagh and of Byron—Scott whom the very pig ran after with squeals of embarrassing affection. We see it in Charles Lamb, defending his friend Leigh Hunt to his friend Southey, and in the correspondence between Lamb and Southey which followed, a model for all time to those who become involved in controversy with their friends. We see this humanity in Sir Ralph Abercromby, anxious, as he was carried dying off the field, lest the soldier's blanket placed under his head should not get back to its rightful owner; or in the British army of the Peninsula, so trained by Wellington, that when at last it entered France, it caused a sensation among the French peasantry (which has lasted for three generations)[1] by paying double for the cattle taken. And once again we see it in Keats, 'so tremulous and hypersensitive' (as Mrs. Campbell has it) that finding a big butcher ill-treating a kitten, he fought him (scientifically) for nearly an hour. The butcher was then assisted home.

It was in this age that England saved herself by her exertions, and Europe by her example. England has helped Europe by her exertions often, but we have to go back to the age of Bede to find a time when the example of England had been so useful to Europe. A parallel between Byron and the Venerable Bede might be pressed too far: but there are two points of resemblance. Of all writers born in England, Byron perhaps seems most likely to rival Bede in the length of time during which his influence abroad will last. And,

[1] See Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 99, 126.

secondly, in both cases the writer owes much of his influence to the fact that the Englishmen of his age were good Europeans, and had deserved well of the Continent. The England of Scott and Wordsworth had problems enough to solve. But we ought not to think of it as a land which was 'no place for' such righteous persons as Shelley or Byron. Byron himself did not think so:

> Yet was I born where men are proud to be
> Not without cause.

We may turn to Shelley's Sonnet on *England in 1819* for information about Shelley, but hardly for a fair view of the England of that year. It was the year of Ruskin's birth: and Ruskin grew up, a product of the 'Georgian stables', to carry on through a long life his struggle for humanity. And perhaps more than to any one other age, Ruskin turns for help and encouragement to this generation, to the great and humane men of 1798 to 1830: to Wordsworth, to Scott, and equally to Byron.

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Lord Macaulay: the Pre-eminent Victorian

By

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LORD MACAULAY—THE PRE-EMINENT VICTORIAN

THE seriousness of the effort now being made to discover and appreciate the *ethos* of the Victorian Age is a noteworthy fact of current criticism. But a few years ago we used the phrase 'Victorianism' merely as a contemptuous synonym for middle-class respectability; to-day it is a favourite topic not only for casual gossip, but for serious discussion, even for professorial lectures. Victorianism, indeed, has already assumed the dignity of an historical phase; there is every indication that a few years hence it will have acquired the solemnity of a cult. This development is largely, I suppose, a time-process. Even I, a somewhat late Victorian, find it difficult to remember, when discussing the matter with undergraduates, that none of them lived under the dominion of the great Queen—and yet, to the children of my generation it seemed impossible that Victoria should die, that the word 'King' should come into the Book of Common Prayer, that distinguished advocates should put anything but 'Q.C.' after their names; and when the impossible happened, we listened wonderingly while our elders went about and said to each other in all seriousness: 'Don't you feel as if you had lost a mother?'

But now Victorianism is something different. It is no longer just the besetting sin of one's parents. As it becomes more and more remote, it gathers round it all the interest of a past civilization, all the picturesqueness of the antique.

This change of perspective is exemplified in a hundred ways:

An old gentleman is described as 'a picturesque figure in side-whiskers who goes into the city every day in a top-hat'; the top-hat, it should be noted, is now accounted to the old gentleman for aesthetic righteousness—it gives him 'character'. A generation ago it would have stamped him as a Philistine.

Similarly, with mid-Victorian furniture, while we may still contend that the bulk of it is intrinsically ugly, it is gradually becoming fashionable to qualify such condemnation by a good word for the sound workmanship, the solidity, the quality of the material. The horsehair sofa is no longer merely antiquated; it is antique—and, before I die, I am prepared to hear a collector talk enthusiastically about a genuine 1870 antimacassar.

Everywhere we may note this larger geniality now displayed towards the Victorian Age: Mr. Michael Sadleir, in his noble championship of Trollope, finds himself in honesty compelled to defend the mid-Victorian England which Trollope represented; Mr. Laurence Housman, in his imaginary dialogues, cherishes, with sentimental care, what he describes as the bloom upon the Victorian grape; even the ironic spirit of Mr. Lytton Strachey seems to suffer a sea change under the influence of the study of Victoria herself.

But it is time to recall Mr. Sadleir's very salutary warning against loose talk about 'Victorianism' as a whole. What profit, indeed, can there be in any attempt to affix a common label to the work, say, of John Stuart Mill, Robert Browning, and Mr. Max Beerbohm?

But if we limit ourselves to the period of Early Victorianism (that is, the period 1837 to 1850), we may at any rate be able to discern certain foundations of the social and political philosophy of the period; and the broadest of these foundations were Decency and *Laissez-faire*.[1]

Of the Early Victorian standard of decency it may be said first, that it represented a reaction against the jovial licence of social life in the eighteenth century and in the Regency period; and secondly, that it was maintained at its full height by the influence of the Evangelical movement and the influence of the Court life of Victoria herself. It was not that the Early Victorian reader was incapable of enjoying, say, *Tom Jones*; but his enjoyment was subject to those qualifications which were codified by Thackeray in his *Lectures on the English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*. What no Early Victorian could understand was Fielding's own claim that in *Tom Jones* the reader would find 'nothing inconsistent with the strictest Rules of Decency'. The Rules had been altered; and perhaps one of the simplest illustrations of their revision is to be found in a comparison between the description of Mr. Pickwick's famous adventure with a middle-aged lady in yellow curl-papers at the Great White Horse at Ipswich and Fielding's description of how the hapless Parson Adams climbed inadvertently into Mrs. Slipslop's bed. It is not a question of the ethical superiority of the Early Victorians. Parson Adams was at least as good a moralist as Mr. Pickwick. The change lies in the matter of decency.

Laissez-faire was, of course, the central doctrine of the political philosophy of the Early Victorians. Jeremy Bentham, in his formulation of his theory of the greatest happiness of the greatest number

[1] A pamphlet entitled *The End of Laissez-Faire* was recently published; a similar pamphlet, *The End of Decency*, may be expected—perhaps from America.

as the measure of right and wrong, laid the foundations of that social and political structure which was subsequently built by the philosophic Radicals and the economists of the Manchester School.

Early Victorian Liberalism did not, indeed, blindly follow in the Benthamite path, but it remained loyal to the basic principles of Utility, Democracy, and Individual Liberty; and when the Victorians were confronted with demands for change, which had been intensified, though not created, by international and economic upheaval, their answer was in effect what their greatest poet was to say in another context: 'Let us alone'—let us alone to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market; let us be free of trade-restrictions and you shall have things cheap; let us alone—and enlightened self-interest, the stimulus of competition, and a Parliamentary vote will do the rest.

Now it is significant that many of the famous names which are at once suggested by the mention of the Early Victorian period are, as a matter of fact, associated not with a glorification of, but with a violent attack upon, the theory and practice of *Laissez-faire*. Carlyle and Ruskin regarded it as the greatest of social stumbling-blocks; Newman looked upon Liberalism as the broad end of the atheistic wedge; and, at a rather later date, Matthew Arnold traced the more noisome weeds of Philistinism to the seeds sown by Early and Mid-Victorian Radicals. Even Dickens and Tennyson had misgivings about what Carlyle had called the Condition-of-England Question. Honest doubt, if not open scepticism, about the glory and the greatness of the Victorian Age, very frequently coloured the attitude of the greatest of the Victorians themselves.

But if we look for the expression of a rosy faith in Early Victorian England, of a joyous thankfulness for having lived in so glorious an epoch, there is at any rate one exponent of the faith, whose work lies ready to our hand—I mean the pre-eminent figure of Thomas Babington Macaulay.

Macaulay's early days were spent in the right Evangelical atmosphere. Zachary Macaulay, his father, was a prominent member of the Clapham Sect and the intimate friend and colleague of Wilberforce, Buxton, and other leaders of the Abolitionist movement. It is with little surprise that we learn that the elder Macaulay frowned upon novel-reading—especially before noon. Dram-drinking in the morning, he called it.

One feels that eighteenth-century fiction, in particular, must have been a source of some heart-searching to Zachary Macaulay, and it must be set down to his credit that when, as editor of a

journal called *The Christian Observer*, he received an anonymous contribution eulogizing the works of Fielding and Smollett, he had the magnanimity to print it. Down upon the editorial head came the violent wrath of his subscribers; one of them announced his intention not only of ceasing to take the paper, but of consigning the offensive number to the flames. Meanwhile the editor had learned that the guilty contributor was his own thirteen-year-old son. On the face of it this may seem to suggest a divergence on the part of the Macaulays from the Victorian standard of decency. But here Macaulay's attitude was qualified by his literary voracity —an attitude defined at a later date in his essay on the Restoration dramatists.

It would perhaps be unjustifiable to claim infant precocity as a peculiarly Victorian quality, though there are few records more staggering in this respect than those of Ruskin and John Stuart Mill. Certainly Macaulay can vie with the most notorious of nursery prodigies. A literary critic at the age of thirteen, he was a poet at the age of seven, and the manuscript of one of the many hymns referred to by his mother in a letter written in 1808 has since been reproduced:

> Almighty God of all below,
> Thou canst protect from every foe;
> The Heavens are made by thy great hands,
> One word of thee the Earth commands.
>
> Some men make Gods of red and blue
> And rob their Sovereign of his due:
> The good shall go to Heaven. The fell
> Blasts of thy wrath can bear to hell.

It is perhaps not altogether fanciful to note as characteristic both the ease with which the infant hymnologist divides mankind into two classes and the sureness with which he forecasts their respective destinies.

Macaulay was not sent to a public school, but to a private establishment at Little Shelford, kept by a clergyman, the strictness of whose Evangelicalism was above suspicion, though certain elements of geniality were admitted into the sacred gloom of the Early Victorian Sabbath:

'My dear Papa (wrote Thomas on 26 April 1813),

'Since I have given you a detail of weekly duties, I hope you will be pleased to be informed of my Sunday's occupations. It is quite a day of rest here, and I really look to it with pleasure through the whole of the week. After breakfast we learn a chapter in the Greek Testament, that is with the aid of our Bibles, and without doing it with a

dictionary like other lessons. We then go to church. We dine almost as soon as we come back, and we are left to ourselves till afternoon church. During this time I employ myself in reading, and Mr. Preston lends me any books for which I ask him, so that I am nearly as well off in this respect as at home, except for one thing, which, though I believe it is useful, is not very pleasant. I can only ask for one book at a time, and cannot touch another till I have read it through. We then go to church, and after we come back I read as before till tea-time. After tea we write out the sermon. I cannot help thinking that Mr. Preston uses all imaginable means to make us forget it, for he gives us a glass of wine each on Sunday, and on Sunday only, the very day when we want to have all our faculties awake: and some do literally go to sleep during the sermon, and look rather silly when they wake. I, however, have not fallen into this disaster.'

One further letter belonging to Macaulay's schoolboy period deserves quotation as showing the extraordinarily mature view which he took of current history. He writes from Shelford on 11 April 1814:

'My dear Mama,

'The news is glorious indeed. Peace! Peace with a Bourbon, with a descendant of Henri Quatre, with a prince who is bound to us by all the ties of gratitude. I have some hopes that it will be a lasting peace; that the troubles of the last twenty years may make kings and nations wiser. I cannot conceive a greater punishment to Buonaparte than that which the allies have inflicted on him. How can his ambitious mind support it? All his great projects and schemes which once made every throne in Europe tremble, are buried in the solitude of an Italian isle. How miraculously everything has been conducted! We almost seem to hear the Almighty saying to the fallen tyrant, "For this cause have I raised thee up, that I might show in thee My power." '

There is here no question of pose. The letter was intended solely for the domestic circle; both the rhetoric and the dramatic view of history are entirely spontaneous and characteristic.

At the end of the letter he turns to another subject, the controversy between the Clapham sect and Dr. Herbert Marsh:

'I saw to-day that greatest of churchmen, that pillar of Orthodoxy, that true friend to the Liturgy, that mortal enemy to the Bible Society—Herbert Marsh, D.D., Professor of Divinity on Lady Margaret's foundation. I stood looking at him for about ten minutes, and shall always continue to maintain that he is a very ill-favoured gentleman as far as outward appearance is concerned.'

At Trinity College, Cambridge, Macaulay was supremely happy —except for the Mathematics. Of the fellowship which he won in

1824 he was probably prouder than any other distinction which came to him in later life:

> 'I can never remember the time', says his biographer, 'when it was not diligently impressed upon me that, if I minded my syntax, I might eventually hope to reach a position which would give me three hundred pounds a year, a stable for my horse, six dozen of audit ale every Christmas, a loaf and two pats of butter every morning, a good dinner for nothing, with as many almonds and raisins as I could eat at dessert.'

Whether these Victorian attractions are still dangled before the eyes of aspirants to Trinity fellowships I do not stay to inquire.

Macaulay's subsequent career may be summed up in two words —Politics and Literature; in 1825 there appeared his first contribution to the *Edinburgh Review*—the essay on Milton—and in 1830 he entered Parliament. It was characteristic that with all his vast range of reading, his fine scholarship, his fluent style, and his early connexion with the *Edinburgh Review*, Macaulay did not contemplate a purely literary career. The possibility of 'writing to relieve not the fulness of the mind but the emptiness of the pocket' was abhorrent to him. At that time, moreover, the theory and the practice of politics held an attraction for brilliant young men which is rarely felt by the young lions of to-day. To the Victorians politics really mattered, and though Macaulay first made his mark in London by a critical essay on Milton, politics and political subjects quickly claimed him for their own. From Milton he turned to Machiavelli and Hallam and Southey and James Mill. As early as 1826 Crabb Robinson described him as 'Overflowing with words and not poor in thought. Liberal in opinion, but no radical.' Macaulay was thus eminently fitted to be a protagonist in the Reform Bill movement, and the fact that he distrusted the political theories of the Utilitarians, whose principles were at the bottom of much of the political development of the nineteenth century, does not make him any the less representative of his age. As Leslie Stephen said, 'he ought by all his intellectual sympathies to be a Utilitarian'; but probably he distrusted their theories not so much because they were Utilitarian, as because they were theories. Macaulay, indeed, was ashamed of the youthful arrogance of his attack upon James Mill and suppressed the essays; but one sentence from the end of the second essay is worth quoting:

> 'Our fervent wish and we will add our sanguine hope is that we may see such a reform in the House of Commons as may render its votes the express image of the opinion of the middle orders of Britain.'

Similarly in the essay on Hallam, Macaulay wrote:

> 'A great statesman might, by judicious and timely reformations, by reconciling the two great branches of the natural aristocracy, the capitalists and the landowners, and by so widening the base of the government as to interest in its defence the whole of the middle class, that brave, honest and sound-hearted class, which is as anxious for the maintenance of order and the security of property as it is hostile to corruption and oppression, succeed in averting a struggle to which no rational friend of liberty or of law can look forward without great apprehensions.'

Here is the characteristic Victorian alliance between the new middle class of traders and the old landowners—what Matthew Arnold would have called an unholy alliance between Philistines and Barbarians. What of Arnold's third class, the Populace? Their view was expressed a few weeks after the passing of the Reform Bill, in a journal called *The Poor Man's Guardian*, in which the Bill was described as a 'damnable delusion, giving us as many tyrants as there are shopkeepers'. But to Macaulay any suggestion of universal suffrage was something to be regarded with pious horror —he was 'Liberal in opinion, but no radical'.

From 1834 to 1838 Macaulay served as a Member of the Supreme Council of India. The motives which had led him to accept the office were frankly stated in a letter to his sister. His family would be partially dependent upon him; he wished to live like a gentleman and his political activities did not allow him sufficient time to earn a decent living by his pen. In India his salary would be £10,000 per annum, of which he would save half; in five years he would be able to return to England with a snug little fortune of £30,000. Material comfort and security, conditions which were essential to the development of the Victorian mentality, were assured.

'Without a competence,' Macaulay wrote to Lord Lansdowne shortly before his departure for India, 'it is not very easy for a public man to be honest; it is almost impossible for him to be thought so.' But Macaulay was no doubt equally honest in his view of the opportunity which India afforded: 'I can scarcely conceive a nobler field', he wrote, 'than that which our Indian Empire now presents to a statesman.'

Macaulay's Indian years, like all his years, were crowded; and statesmanship and literature are mingled almost inextricably in the record of them. For the voyage he provided himself with Richardson, Voltaire, Gibbon, Sismondi, Davila, the *Orlando* in Italian, *Don Quixote* in Spanish, Homer in Greek, Horace in Latin. Many a

post-Victorian has similarly determined to use the opportunity of a long voyage for the study of this or that great author; the difference between him and Lord Macaulay is that Macaulay actually read the books. Nor was the stream of his productivity abated. The drafting of notes on the Indian Penal Code, of State Papers on the Calcutta Press, of the famous Education Minute still left him time to write the essay on Bacon; and in the margins of his editions of the classics there were to be found the *disjecta membra* of a political diary. Thus, on the first page of Theocritus there was entered a note of Lord W. Bentinck sailing on 20 March 1835; on the last page of the *De Amicitia* a note that Lord Auckland had arrived at Government House and been sworn in on 5 March 1836; beneath an idyll of Moschus a note of Sir Robert Peel being First Lord of the Treasury.

After Macaulay's return to England in 1838, it was not long before he embarked upon the work which was to represent in the fullest sense the application of his literary power to the political story of England. The plan of the *History* is briefly outlined in a letter of 20 July 1838; it is to begin with the Revolution of 1688 and the death of George IV is suggested as the most suitable *terminus ad quem*:

> 'The History would then be an entire view of all the transactions which took place between the Revolution which brought the Crown into harmony with the Parliament and the Revolution which brought the Parliament into harmony with the nation.'

But the project, ambitious as it was, did not involve any kind of retirement to the 'shelter of academic bowers'. The work of writing was begun in 1839, the year in which Macaulay re-entered Parliament and became Secretary at War; and it is highly characteristic that Macaulay, a minister in an Early Victorian Whig Cabinet, should have planned his History to cover the period in which, as he saw it, the triumph of Whiggery should be progressively displayed. He saw the history of England's past as a great drama in which the heroic parts were played by those who had fought for constitutional liberty not as for the sublime aim of a consistent political theory, but as for a practical good which was essential to an ordered, civilized, and democratic government. 'No man', says Cotter Morrison, 'was ever less of a philosopher or more of a politician than Macaulay. He had an eye to business, not to abstract truth.'

But, of course, Macaulay had an eye to a great deal more. What has been called his mastery of *mise-en-scène* made his *History* a kind

of revelation to the eager thousands who rushed to buy it—a revelation of the picturesque and dramatic elements in the story of English political progress. Nothing like it had been written before, and Macaulay, like all good artists, knew quite well what he was doing: 'There is merit, no doubt,' he wrote in his Diary, 'in Hume, Robertson, Voltaire, and Gibbon. Yet it is not the thing. I have a conception of history more just, I am confident, than theirs.' This is not conceit. It is the conscious and confident artistry of the creator of a new literary form. It is exactly the same note as that struck in the previous century by Boswell in relation to biography and by Fielding in relation to fiction.

With a buoyant belief, then, both in his own power of presentation and in the material which English history provided for a graphic record of constitutional progress, Macaulay completed his first two volumes for publication in 1848. The date has a certain significance. It was the year in which nearly every country in Europe had its revolution and in which the Chartists had their meeting for the presentation of their monster petition.

Carlyle's rhetoric became more and more gloomy:

> 'High shouts of exultation, in every dialect, by every vehicle of speech and writing, rise from far and near over this last avatar of Democracy in 1848; and yet, to wise minds, the first aspect it presents seems rather to be one of boundless misery and sorrow. . . . To the great mass of men, I am aware, the matter presents itself quite on this hopeful side. Democracy they consider to *be* a kind of "Government". The old model, formed long since, and brought to perfection in England now 200 years ago, has proclaimed itself to all Nations as the new healing for every wo. . . . The contrary of all this is deeply manifest to me . . . and the farther I look into the roots of all this, the more hateful, ruinous and dismal does the state of mind all this could have originated in appear to me.'

Ruskin was more temperate, but equally solemn:

> 'The aspect of the years that approach us is as solemn as it is full of mystery; and the weight of evil against which we have to contend is increasing like the letting out of water. . . . The blasphemies of the earth are sounding louder, and its miseries heaped heavier every day. . . .'

From these forebodings it is interesting to turn to the famous opening of the Third Chapter of Macaulay's *History*. If Macaulay's belief in Early Victorian civilization is implicit in all his writings, it is most clearly and concisely explicit in this chapter:

> 'If we would study with profit the history of our ancestors, we must

be constantly on our guard against that delusion which the well-known names of families, places, and offices naturally produce, and must never forget that the country of which we read was a very different country from that in which we live. In every experimental science there is a tendency towards perfection. In every human being there is a wish to ameliorate his own condition. . . . No ordinary misfortune, nor ordinary misgovernment, will do so much to make a nation wretched, as the constant progress of physical knowledge and the constant effort of every man to better himself will do to make a nation prosperous.'

There is the word of the true believer in progress, in the effort of the individual to better himself.

'It has often been found that profuse expenditure, heavy taxation, absurd commercial restrictions, corrupt tribunals, disastrous wars, seditions, persecutions, conflagrations, inundations, have not been able to destroy capital as fast as the exertions of private citizens have been able to create it.'

There is the Victorian faith in *Laissez-faire*.

'In consequence partly of our geographical and partly of our moral position, we have, during several generations, been exempt from evils which have elsewhere impeded the efforts and destroyed the fruits of industry.'

There is the Victorian pride in insularity—the thankfulness that England is not as other nations are.

'Every man has felt entire confidence that the state would protect him in the possession of what has been earned by his diligence and hoarded by his self-denial.'

There is the Victorian glorification of self-help. Macaulay had a profound distrust of paternal government, but the State would help those who helped themselves.

'Under the benignant influence of peace and liberty, science has flourished and has been applied to practical purposes on a scale never before known. The consequence is that a change to which the history of the old world furnishes no parallel has taken place in our country.'

There is the triumphant note of Victorian optimism. It was an age without parallel.

To see a cold shower of scorn poured upon this enthusiastic fire we may turn to the journal of John Mitchel, the Irish agitator, who was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation in this same year 1848. On board ship he read Macaulay's *Essays*, for want of something better, as he is careful to add, and in his Diary he wrote:

'He is a born Edinburgh Reviewer, this Macaulay, and indeed a type-reviewer—an authentic specimen-page of nineteenth-century literature. He has the right omniscient tone and air and the true knack of administering reverential flattery to British civilization, British prowess, honour, enlightenment, and all that, especially to the great nineteenth century and its astounding civilization, that is, to his readers. It is altogether a new thing in the history of mankind, this triumphant glorification of a current century upon being the century it is. No former age, before Christ or after, ever took any pride in itself and sneered at the wisdom of its ancestors; and the new phenomenon indicates, I believe, not higher wisdom, but deeper stupidity.'

This is more frankly brutal criticism than that to which Macaulay was subjected by later Victorians, but the opening pages of the Third Chapter are almost in themselves sufficient to show why Macaulay has been pilloried as the Prince of Philistines. One of his weaknesses was particularly open to attack—his dislike and contempt of abstract speculation. True, he loved Plato, but not chiefly, as his biographer admits, for the sake of Plato's metaphysics. He read the *Republic* with the eyes of a Whig and an Englishman, and his sweeping view of the futility of the ancient philosophers is expressed with characteristic vehemence in the essay on Bacon:

'They promised what was impracticable; they despised what was practicable; they filled the world with long words and long beards; and they left it as wicked and as ignorant as they found it.'

Here, as elsewhere, Macaulay, one of the finest scholars of his time, seems entirely out of sympathy with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. It would, of course, be unfair to maintain that this is a peculiarly Victorian paradox; for in every academic system there is the inherent danger that amongst its prizemen it may produce scholars of wide reading, tenacious memory, and correct expression who may be fundamentally unintellectual. I hope it is not disloyal to add that this is a danger to which Cambridge scholarship, with its fine traditions of soundness and accuracy, is especially liable; I hope similarly that it is not impolite to conjecture that the dangers, which may conceivably be incurred in another place, of brilliant dialectic built upon the sands of imperfect knowledge are dangers greater than those to which the Cambridge man is exposed.

About Macaulay's deficiency in this matter there can be no doubt; and his imagination was similarly limited. This again may sound paradoxical, since critics are agreed, and indeed it is obvious, that no historian has presented the past with greater vividness of effect.

But this was the work of a purely historical, not an intellectual, imagination—a power which Macaulay had of visualising an historic scene and depicting it in graphic detail. Local colour was there in abundance, but Macaulay's sense of values was always that of the Whig optimist. Where his imagination failed was in picturing to himself, even dimly, a world which might have a scale of values entirely different from that of the cultured member of the Victorian civilization, a world in which the criterion of reality was not applicability to, but independence of, material result, a world in which values were absolute.

It was with this pictorial, unintellectual imagination that Macaulay approached the subject of poetry. It would be unfair, perhaps, to assess his poetical judgment too strictly by the opinions expressed in the essay on Milton. Nevertheless, there is something fundamental in Macaulay's view of poetry as producing an illusion on the eye of the mind, and in the antithesis between the light of knowledge on the one hand and the phantoms of the poet on the other:

> 'We cannot', he says, 'unite the incompatible advantages of reality and deception, the clear discernment of truth and the exquisite enjoyment of fiction.'

Reality and deception—the clear-cut division is characteristic. The poet may create beautiful fantasies out of his peculiar imagination, but a breath of solid fact may at any time blow them sky-high. Poetry, unless it be an historical record in verse, is a fairy-tale for grown-ups. What of Macaulay's own poetry? From the time of its publication onwards the collection of *Lays of Ancient Rome* was the Victorian child's guide to poetry. If the Victorian school-boy (the real school-boy—not the omniscient stripling created by Macaulay in his own image) had never heard anything else about Macaulay, he would at any rate remember the creator of Lars Porsena, of false Sextus, of the ranks of Tuscany, of the good logs of Algidus, of

> The priest who slew the slayer
> And shall himself be slain.

Matthew Arnold's onslaught is, of course, almost as famous as the *Lays* themselves:

> 'To my mind a man's power to detect the ring of false metal in those Lays is a good measure of his fitness to give an opinion about poetical matters:
>
> To every man upon this earth
> Death cometh soon or late
>
> it is hard to read without a cry of pain.'

Well, I repeat, we all read and learnt the lines as children and we probably did so without exclamations of critical anguish.

In certain stanzas, indeed, any one with an elementary critical sense will find the jingle of the sentimental antiphonies almost unbearable:

> Then none was for a party;
> Then all were for the state;
> Then the great man helped the poor,
> And the poor man loved the great.

The even mutuality of rich and poor is like the ceremony of 'setting-to-partners' in a Victorian set of Lancers.

On the other hand:

> And nearer fast and nearer
> Doth the red whirlwind come;
> And louder still and still more loud,
> From underneath that rolling cloud
> Is heard the trumpet's war-note proud,
> The trampling, and the hum.
> And plainly and more plainly
> Now through the gloom appears,
> Far to left and far to right,
> In broken gleams of dark-blue light,
> The long array of helmets bright,
> The long array of spears.

That is vivid and descriptive verse conveying exactly what the writer means to convey in rapid and appropriate language.

For myself, I believe that the truest word about the *Lays*, as about some other matters, has been said by Mr. Saintsbury:

> 'They have the special merit that liking for them will mature into liking for greater poetry still. The *Lays* in a certain, and only a certain sense, may be milk for babes; but good milk is a great deal better than tainted meat and unsound wine.'

Side by side in the collection of Macaulay's miscellaneous poems may be found two astonishing pieces:

> By those white cliffs I never more must see,
> By that dear language which I spake like thee,
> Forget all feuds, and shed one English tear
> O'er English dust. A broken heart lies here.

If any one still believes that the heroic couplet is an inadequate medium for emotional expression, let him read the *Epitaph on a Jacobite*, the *tour de force* of a Victorian Whig. The other piece,

The Last Buccaneer, may seem at first sight just another experiment in the manner of the ballad; but something more is here:

> From St. Jago's wealthy port, from Havannah's royal fort,
> The seaman goes forth without fear:
> For since that stormy night not a mortal hath had sight
> Of the flag of the last Buccaneer.

Reality and deception—In which world are we? Is the last Buccaneer more, or less, real than Lars Porsena?

But as an influence upon Victorian taste, Macaulay the essayist was even more powerful than Macaulay the historian or Macaulay the poet. It is doubtful indeed whether any collection of essays has had a greater effect upon the critical standards of ordinary English readers than had Macaulay's, both for his own and for succeeding generations.

The most notorious example, perhaps, is that of his treatment of Boswell and Johnson. Macaulay, an artist himself, gave Boswell's artistic triumph its proper praise:

> 'Homer is not more decidedly the first of heroic poets, Shakespeare is not more decidedly the first of dramatists, Demosthenes is not more decidedly the first of orators, than Boswell is the first of biographers. He has no second. He has distanced all his competitors so decidedly, that it is not worth while to place them. Eclipse is first, and the rest nowhere.'

So far, so good. But when Macaulay begins to contemplate Boswell the Man, what does he find? He finds to his horror—the horror of the enthusiastic Victorian—that Boswell was a man of no academic distinction, a man who was frequently tipsy and frequently involved in disreputable love-affairs, a man—but why feebly try to paraphrase Macaulay himself?

> 'Servile and impertinent, shallow and pedantic, a bigot and a sot, bloated with family pride and eternally blustering about the dignity of a born gentleman, yet stooping to be a tale-bearer, an eavesdropper, a common butt in the taverns of London.'

Macaulay, the great master of picturesque antithesis, is faced with an antithesis which he cannot explain—and then comes his astonishing attempt at a solution:

> 'Other great writers (he says), Goldsmith, for instance, had their weaknesses, but these men attained literary eminence in spite of their weaknesses. Boswell attained it by reason of his weaknesses. If he had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer.'

Thus was born the famous 'inspired idiot' theory of James Boswell.

To-day, perhaps, it is almost unnecessary to refute such a fantastic *lucus a non lucendo*. Macaulay's essay was indeed soon followed by a juster estimate of Boswell made by Thomas Carlyle, but it was Macaulay's view which determined the Victorian attitude towards Boswell's achievement. Such was the vogue of the *Essays* that it was almost literally true that every Victorian school-boy knew something of the essay on Boswell's Johnson. The tragedy was that, until quite recently, it was often the only thing about Boswell that he did know.

To Johnson himself Macaulay did a greater measure of justice. But here again the kind of emphasis which Macaulay laid on Johnson's oddity of bearing, his table manners, his slovenly dress, his misery in Grub Street, his dismissal by Mrs. Thrale, did much to conventionalize the Victorian view of the Great Lexicographer. It was left for the late Sir Walter Raleigh and other critics to restore the true perspective of the Johnson picture, not only by a fresh study of Boswell, but by a revaluation of Johnson's own work as scholar and critic.

Another essay which reveals in a special sense the Victorian attitude towards literature is that which treats of the Comic Dramatists of the Restoration. At once Macaulay was faced with the questions of decency and morality.

> 'The plays to which he [i.e. Leigh Hunt] now acts as introducer are, with few exceptions, such as, in the opinion of many very respectable people, ought not to be reprinted. In this opinion we can by no means concur. We cannot wish that any work or class of works which has exercised a great influence on the human mind, and which illustrates the character of an important epoch in letters, politics and morals, should disappear from the world. If we err in this matter, we err with the gravest men and bodies of men in the empire and especially with the Church of England and with the great schools of learning which are connected with her. . . . The Athenian Comedies in which there are scarcely a hundred lines together without some passage of which Rochester would have been ashamed, have been reprinted at the Pitt Press and the Clarendon Press under the direction of syndics and delegates appointed by the Universities and have been illustrated with notes by reverend, very reverend, and right reverend commentators.'

Macaulay had the common sense to see that a student who was allowed to read Aristophanes and Catullus must not be debarred from *The Country Wife* and *The Way of the World*. Even decency must modify its claims when faced with the honest demands of scholarship. But what was inadmissible and indeed incomprehen-

sible by Macaulay was that the characters in Restoration Comedy should be judged, as Lamb claimed, as inhabitants of a region where 'no cold moral reigned'.

> 'The question', wrote Macaulay, 'is simply this, whether a man of genius who constantly and systematically endeavours to make this sort of character [i.e. the town-rake, the woman of the town] attractive by uniting it with beauty, grace, dignity, spirit, a high social position, popularity, literature, wit, taste, knowledge of the world, brilliant success in every undertaking, does or does not make an ill use of his powers. We own that we are unable to understand how this question can be answered in any way but one.'

There is the triumphant Victorian conclusion. Whether Macaulay or Charles Lamb is right is not the immediate question. The point is rather that nowhere do we find the Victorian view expressed with such magnificent confidence and certainty as in the pages of Macaulay. In his belief in the Abolition of Slavery, in *Laissez-faire*, in Constitutional Democracy, and in the other principles of Victorian Liberalism, Macaulay was very far from standing alone. But not many in his own, or in later generations, could rise to such a certainty of moral and political conviction. Many of the questions which are ranged under the head of Life, or Art, or Being (questions which tend to acquire a speculative or even a metaphysical character) held no interest for Macaulay. But of those questions which did interest him he was commonly able to say and to feel that he could not understand how they could be answered in any way but one.

Happy are the people who have no doubts, even if they purchase their certainty at the expense of imagination. Macaulay had no doubts—even about the Great Exhibition of 1851:

> 'Everything was exhilarating and the temper of the multitude the best possible. . . . There is just as much chance of a revolution in England as of the falling of the moon. I made my way into the building; a most gorgeous sight; vast; graceful; beyond the dreams of the Arabian romances. I cannot think that the Caesars ever exhibited a more splendid spectacle.'

There at the heart of Victorian splendour let us leave the figure of Lord Macaulay—serene, successful, pre-eminent.

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SHAKESPEARE, POLITICS, AND POLITICIANS

(An address given on 25 January 1929 to the Leeds Branch of the English Association, and now set down, without attempt to turn spoken words into a piece of writing, as closely as memory and the notes of an auditor allow of accuracy in the recording of an extempore discourse.)

IN these democratic days, there would appear to be singular tactlessness in any attempt to do honour to Shakespeare's name by recalling his political opinions. There is nothing in him the average man of to-day finds harder to forgive than his contempt for the populace. The extremest reactionary of the Junior Constitutional in our time, even at his whitest heat of bolshephobia, would at least distinguish the people from the mob. But for Shakespeare, in his blindness, democracy was simple ochlocracy, and a tribune of the people could be no other than a demagogue. Jack Cade is his notion of the popular leader whose platform is the people's discontent. Much more exasperating than Shakespeare's indifference to social and economic problems in Cade's programme is the antipathy which permits him to revel in a grossly burlesque portrait of the man. The politics of the artist who depicted Cade are prejudices, it would seem, and not principles. Even as prejudices, they strike one as considerably in arrear of time. A Roman patrician might perhaps have looked on the world in this way, and felt no need to justify the instinct prompting him to do so. But such assumptions seem much less natural in the mind of a provincial burgess of sixteenth-century England. Yet Shakespeare's politics are indeed very like to those of Coriolanus. Cade is disqualified as a legislator, because laws coming from a mouth reeking so strongly of toasted cheese as does his, will be but stinking law. To Coriolanus, the rank-scentedness of the many is no less a political disablement than is their mutability. Both Shakespeare and Coriolanus see nothing but anarchy in democracy —

> where gentry, title, wisdom,
> Cannot conclude but by the yea and no
> Of general ignorance—

the very phrasing, for what it explicitly says of gentry and title as political assets, and for what it implicitly assumes in associating wisdom with a titled gentry and ignorance with the rest, is in the true aristocratic tradition. There can be no doubt at all that so far as Shakespeare had anything we may call polling-booth politics,

they were such that even a backwoodsman of to-day would hardly dare to whisper his sneaking assent.

Is there, then, nothing to be urged in excuse for recalling Shakespeare's politics but the antiquary's delight to rifle a benevolent oblivion's hoard? Granting that what Shakespeare thought about politics hardly appears worthy of more than a few minutes' attention from the far more politically expert man in the streets of our own day, is that all that is worth the saying?

The problem is part of a much bigger question: what, in fact, does it matter what any poet thinks about anything? The answer would appear to be simple: it matters exactly nothing, unless the poet, besides being a poet, happens to possess a capacity for thinking so far above that of other men, that his thoughts are likely to be of more worth than theirs. But to look to him, merely as a poet, for a valid system of moral or religious or political ideas, is to look for turnips on a rose-tree. As far as sheer thought is concerned, poets are less remarkable for uttering what no one has thought before, than for saying what everybody has been thinking, but what nobody has hitherto said so effectively—'what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed'. Maybe there is no department of life in which the poet who regards this as his function is of more use to the world than in politics. Virgil, for instance, scarcely has anything coherent enough to call a political theory. But he stood for peace, for cosmopolitan understanding, for lenity, and for justice:

pacisque imponere morem,
Parcere subiectis et debèllare superbos—

lines our own James I took from him for a motto. They do not make Virgil a political philosopher. But in these democratic days, when we are all governors, what really matters is the extent to which such humane commonplaces of politics are part of the inheritance of every citizen of the world. It is Virgil's power as a poet to wrap these generous truisms of corporate life in phrases which haunt the minds of men and hover about their lips,

victorquè virum volitare per ora.

But the merit is Virgil the poet's, not Virgil the thinker's.

Poets, of course, are not to be denied the common human right to think, and, so far as they may think systematically, the privilege of having a complete philosophy of their own. But, if to philosophize is to build up an organized system of the universe, the poet is less fitted than any other mortal to be a philosopher. The philosopher's way of resolving experience into a philosophy is a process the main stages of which are familiar to all of us who have stumbled across Euclid's *pons asinorum*. Without passion, without

prejudice, unaffected by fancy and unmoved by sentiment, we must regard the angles *ABC* and *ACB* solely in the light of pure reason. A violent liking for *ACB* or a strong distaste for *ABC* would inevitably distort the argument and nullify the search for scientific and philosophic truth. But the poet is a poet precisely because these sensuous and non-rational instruments of his personality are stronger in him than in the rest of us. A sparrow pecking in the sand sets every nerve in Keats's body vibrating. The sight of a daisy affects philosophers and commonplace folk like ourselves very much as it affected Peter Bell. It stirs a Wordsworth or a Burns to ecstasy. The more poet a poet is, the less is he capable of absorbing experience impersonally and dispassionately. He cannot stifle his emotions and suppress his imagination; he cannot give pure reason an absolute sway. It is physically impossible for him to let experience slowly submit itself to his ratiocinative faculty and thence come forth as a formula, a systematized philosophy. It must invade every fibre of his being, run through every vein in his body, and ooze out of his fingers as a poem. What a poet thinks is of little moment, compared with what he feels and what he sees; and if what he sees and feels about is a creation of his own rather than of nature's, it is still no creation of his reason, but of his imagination.

There is, of course, nothing novel in this distinction between thinker and poet. Friends and enemies of poetry have always recognized it, and their unanimity is curiously illustrated by the common fortune of a famous passage in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. The lover of poetry quotes with ecstatic applause the lines describing the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling, as his imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, and his pen, turning them to shapes, gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. But how seldom is it remembered that these lines in the speech of Theseus are part of an attack on poetry, and that their function in the economy of the play clearly indicates Shakespeare's endorsement of the indictment. The poet is grouped with the lunatic and the lover, because, all compact of imagination, he apprehends far more than cool reason comprehends or than common sense gives warrant to. A very homely simile makes it plain how serious a disadvantage is such apprehension and lack of cool reason, in a world where even bare survival depends on the faculty for distinguishing, immediately, certainly, and unflinchingly, between bushes and bears.

Neither friend nor foe, it is clear, expects an artist to be endowed with cool reason. Why, therefore, go to him for cool thinking, and for the ordered system of thought the thinker produces as his

philosophy? It would appear the most futile of errands. Yet everybody does it. There are volumes devoted to Mr. Shaw and to Mr. Galsworthy in which the bulk of the space expounds their social philosophy, often with scarcely a recognition that each of them is primarily an artist. Still, it is a no less fundamental article in the wisdom of Shakespeare's comedies, that the habits which horse-sense or mother-wit have inculcated in mankind are the chief safeguards of the race's sanity. There must be some good cause for our general expectation of a philosophy from the poet.

Better than any other form of art, drama offers a mode of reconciling the two apparently irreconcilable points of view, although by its very nature it tends in the first instance to obscure the fundamental issue. Drama introduces men talking and thinking as men do talk and think, and each of its characters may have his theory of this or that form of life or even of the whole of it, and so the matter of a play may be chock-full of more or less explicit systems of thought. If the dramatist, besides being an artist, is also in his unartistic moments a thinker, these views he allows his people to expound may be well worth our concern. But the general probability is that the more he is a thinker, the less will he be an artist. What he has of his own to give to the world is not what he has comprehended of life. His gift is, in the phrase of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, to reveal what he has apprehended of it. Yet drama requires a kind of apprehension which, in quality and in scope, is, in fact, a sort of philosophy, a sense or a vision of the conditions which control the life of man in the world, or even, indeed, in the universe. A tragedy is a great tragedy because it sweeps to its ending with the conviction that life being what it is, such fate is the inevitable lot of such and such a person. The art of the tragic dramatist is the art of complete self-effacement, so that he may exonerate himself entirely from all complicity in his hero's death. When the ending is arbitrary, when instinctively the onlooker feels a desire to intervene and save the hero, as when the voice in the gallery urges Romeo to wait a minute before stabbing himself, for Juliet is but apparently dead—when these sensations spring from the course of a tragedy, the author is failing to convince us that he has grasped the immutable laws of life; is only intimating to us that he has seen an accident. Not even in the lightest comedy is the dramatist given licence to move his figures here and there at his mere whim. The comic dramatist chooses his hero, and since he has covenanted to produce a comedy, he seeks from his hero a pledge that come what may in the progress of the action, he will be alive and flourishing at the end of it. The play begins: the hero encounters his fellow-men and the common conditions of existence.

He meets difficulties and obstacles—no conflict, no play. But as a comic hero his one duty is ultimately to triumph over them, and, of course, to do so with some appearance of probability. Wherefore the dramatist must endow his hero with the personality or the temperament or the mind or the faculty for mastering common circumstance; and, writing a comedy, he is in fact embodying implicitly his apprehension of the clue to happiness in life, to success in living, his worldly wisdom, which is substantially his philosophy of life. But such apprehension is unconsciously woven into the texture of his play. The deeper it is, the less has it occupied the author's rational consciousness. It is an artist's apprehension, not a thinker's conclusions. His tragedies will ensue from his apprehension of life's ultimate order, his comedies from his apprehension of the prevailing laws of living.

And so, with this long prolusion and delay, to Shakespeare's politics; setting aside finally all concern with what views he may consciously have held on any political programme or on any particular aspect of the art of government. Is it possible in any of his plays to find anything which as an artist he had apprehended of the conditions governing the life political? His tragedies are glimpses of individual man as a nursling of immortality, his vision of the ways of God with man: his comedies are his imaginative experience of the same individual in his domestic and social relationship with other members of civilized society. But by pure chance there was in Shakespeare's day a type of theatrical entertainment which was neither tragedy nor comedy, neither focused mainly on the life eternal, nor on the life private, domestic, and social. There was the so-called History or Chronicle Play.

Perhaps no one but Shakespeare wrote the History Play proper. Others made plays on historical themes. Tragedy from its beginnings had demanded an historical warrant for its action and its heroes; invented tales from novelettes, like the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, were revolutionary novelties. But almost all serious plays on historical subjects are tragedies, not history-plays. In *Richard III*, it is the ruin of the man Richard which is the motive; and that his ruin is effected through his kingship merely indicates that history is the accidental form and tragedy the essential substance of the drama. So, too, in *Richard II*.

But to fob off the clamour for a history-play by providing an historical tragedy was to run away from an aesthetic problem. In its beginnings, the history-play was nothing but a chronicle panorama. A wave of exuberant national sentiment cried out for such stimulus as visible reminders of England's past could give it. The theatre, not as a temple of drama, but as a market-place for

spectacle, was well enough qualified for this sort of cinematographic depiction. It could stage scenes from chronicles. But in so doing, it was catering primarily for a political, and not for an artistic, demand. It was exercising and fostering patriotism. Hence the pageantry of the chronicle play, and its undramatic structure, although, of course, by the accident of its environment, it took to itself freely incidental dramatic scenes, comic or tragic, as episodes in the spectacle. So, in the Cade incidents of *Henry VI*, or the Talbot episode, for a moment the quality of interest becomes in some sense mainly comic or tragic, and the audience is given something of the conventional appeal of comedy or of tragedy, by a playlet within a panorama. But the whole matter of *Henry VI* has no dramatic form. There is no dominant interest, recognizable as a dramatic interest, to hold the audience in continuous suspense.

It seemed as if the political emotion which gave birth to the chronicle play was to remain a manifestation of life, of which the dramatist as a dramatist could only take partial cognizance, either by diverting it to an occasion for comedy or for tragedy, or by giving it free stage play though with only one or two articles, and those the most mechanical, of the many and complex instruments which in full concert make up the art of drama.

The problem was too much for all the Elizabethans but Shakespeare. His *King John* stands at the parting of the ways. It is neither chronicle play nor tragedy: nor is it a history play. It is a chronicle play leaning to tragedy for as much artistic discipline as will give it the semblance of dramatic shape; but it is unwilling to pay the price of such dramatic organization by sacrificing as much of chronicle-spectacle as *Richard III* had done. Indeed, the chronicle elements preponderate. The long first scene of the second act (act one, scene two in the Folio) flouts every rudimentary principle of drama to get more and more characteristic spectacle. Its very stage directions are an ample index to its undramatic quality. The scene is before Angiers. 'Enter Philip King of France, Lewis Dauphin, Austria, Constance, Arthur.' The French and Austrian armies are meeting to pledge themselves as allies in Arthur's cause against his unnatural uncle, English John; and so the boy, and therefore his mother and their domestic attendants are brought into the open field to participate in this ceremony. The alliance made, the armies at once train their cannon against the town of Angiers. Philip, swearing the proper desperate oaths, is just about to give order for the first cannonade, when we are reminded that the ladies are still present. Constance suggests a pause, in the hope that the post may bring an offer of peace from John. Even as she speaks, with a promptitude her

words have quite unnecessarily converted into an entirely undramatic coincidence, the messenger arrives: 'Enter Chattilion'. His message is exciting. The English are here with their armies, and also, strangely, with their royal women-folk, the queen-mother, who has a special commission from the English War Office, an Ate to stir her son to blood and strife, and the Lady Blanch, who is presumably seconded from hospital work at home to keep her aunt company. The message is interrupted by the churlish English drums: 'Drum beats', and in a trice, 'Enter King of England, Bastard, Queene, Blanch, Pembroke, and others', who constitute the English army. The rival kings more or less officially state each his own country's case. But at once the women break into the parley with a very unladylike turn of vituperation, and such congenial entertainment is taken up by subsidiary members of the English corps, the Bastard, and Lady Blanch. Nothing can stop the women's tongues, until fortunately another diversion occurs—'Trumpet sounds. Enter a citizen upon the walles'. And so, another formal parley. England and France bid for the favour of the city. But the solemnity of the occasion calls for relief; there is more back-chat from the subalterns of either side. The upshot is a rousing decision to fight, and the rival armies at once fall into battle-station. Presumably the battle is fought at once, for without interruption in the text, 'Here after excursions, Enter the Herald of France with Trumpets to the gates' to announce a French victory. The words are taken out of his mouth by an English officer: 'Enter English Herald with Trumpet', informing us that a whole hot malicious day has gone since the decision to fight, and that the lusty English, all with purpled hands dyed in the dying slaughter of their foes, have won a complete victory. The citizen tells them both that they are liars: he has been an interested spectator of the conflict, and adjudicates it a draw. The impasse is broken through by a fresh incident. 'Enter the two Kings with their powers at severall doores,' to embark on further recriminations, which appear to be leading to another bout in battle. But the Bastard has a brain-wave. Let France and England join in temporary truce and demolish Angiers. The plan commends itself immediately to the military heads, and is to be executed at once. But the citizen sees now that he and his fellows are in a pretty pickle, and his danger inspires him to a brilliant diplomatic proposal—which reminds us that still somewhere or other in the thick of the bleeding combatants, the ladies are disporting themselves. 'Why', he asks, 'should not "that lovely maid" Blanch marry with Lewis the Dauphin?' A bit of match-making immediately excites the sympathy of the beldame Elinor, and, at

her instigation, John finds that Philip is not unwilling. The Dauphin is brought forward and invited 'to look in the lady's face', to see if he will have her. He endures in an instant all the sentimental throbs of romantic love; and lest the marriage should seem entirely one of convenience, there is a direction—'Whisper with Blanch.' Palpably, this is a very restricted opportunity for a first-class wooing, and not too suitable a place for it, in full view of lately contending armies and interested citizens. But clearly there is magic in the sweet nothings he 'whispers with Blanch'. All that remains is the formal drawing up of the marriage settlement, and the ratification of the terms of peace—except for the insertion of a line to assure us that the fun is not really over: the peace is specious; and one of the ladies has withdrawn to her tent to mope and so guarantee a resumption of hostilities. To round off such a gallimaufry, the stage is at length cleared of all but the Bastard, to allow this flagrant immoralist to draw the moral of the whole scene.

Such is the stuff which is largely characteristic of the substance of *King John*. Obviously, it is not easily amenable to dramatic shaping, however well it may supply the excitement of chronicle-spectacle. At many points there are clear attempts to graft on to it the traditional themes of tragedy. Elinor and Constance are cast to play Senecan roles as harbingers of destiny. Blanch is provided with the conventional dramatic conflict between love and country. The barons of England have to face a recognized tragic dilemma and choose between their sense of honour and loyalty to their king. Above all, there is the incident of Hubert and Arthur, which, if it falls short in the pity and fear of tragedy, certainly excites more than enough of the pathos and horror of tragedy's popular substitute, melodrama. But these episodic diversions in the manner of drama only emphasize the essentially undramatic sweep of the whole matter. Its insufficiency is plain to be seen in the technical career of its nominal hero, King John, and in the circumstances of his final catastrophe. As a conventional tragic hero he must finally die. But his death at the hands of a monk fulfils no dramatic expectancy and satisfies no awakened sense of inevitable doom. What it very clearly does excite and satisfy, however, is a contemporary political sentiment, the anti-papalism which was momentarily a form of English patriotism; and, of course, it adopts another equally un- or extra-artistic principle, that, namely, of conformity with recorded fact. John's death is thus determined by historical and political motives. No less within the play is his life ordained by the same powers. Substantially, he forfeits his place as a technical hero, and the first call on our theatrical interest is won from him by the Bastard.

At first glance, the Bastard's qualifications to offer himself as hero seem grotesque. A similar figure used in a similar theatrical function in our own day, Dick Dudgeon in *The Devil's Disciple*, only manages to bring off so audacious a technical coup by revealing in himself and in his author vast reserves of sentimentality. But Shakespeare refused Falconbridge every opportunity to obtain sentimental credit by a display of skill in the luring of women. Worse still, he gave him merely an appetite for them. The Bastard appears, indeed, to be entirely unfitted to exercise any of the spells by which a sufficient heroism is to be purchased. He comes to us first of all in a most questionable sort. His attitude towards the circumstance of his bastardy is perhaps more ribald than immoral; but his flippancy in discourse with his mother about her sin—'your fault was not your folly', 'with all my heart I thank you for my father'—is a flagrant instance of his brutish pride in flouting constraints imposed by common decency on ordinary moral beings. Throughout the play his humour has always a good deal of the beast in it, as when, in his gibes at Austria, he says:

> Sirrah, were I at home,
> At your den, sirrah, with your lioness,
> I would set an ox-head to your lion's hide,
> And make a monster of you.

Maybe it is this bullishness of his which is the source of his attraction. Perhaps it is because it goes some way towards John Bullishness. Boisterousness of animal spirits and a riotous disregard of proprieties may, of course, express themselves in a low and vigorous sort of humour sufficient to make their owner entertaining. But Falconbridge is more than entertaining in the play. His title is not merely honorary; he establishes his dramatic worth by determining the action of the play. He becomes in fact a pledge of victory for his side. Despicable as he may be as a private individual, he is a national asset. It is in virtue of this capacity that he looms so largely in the play. He is a rudimentary John Bull, a bulwark of England. His technical promotion to the middle stage, and the pushing of John into the wings, marks the transition from tragedy to the history play, a transition, however, which only makes tentative steps in *King John*. But what ultimately will distinguish the history-play from tragedy is beginning to appear. Comedy and tragedy are concerned with the eternal or ephemeral fate of individual man. The history-play is concerned with communities of men, and primarily with nations. The real hero of the English history-play is England.

But just as the author of tragedy, moving his hero from predicament to predicament and at last to his ruin, weaves into the design of his play his apprehension of the ultimate forces which

sway the life of individual man in our universe, so in the history play. At its beginning England is presented in such and such a condition. As the action proceeds, there are changes in the protagonist's welfare; and at the end, if the author is a dramatist with a dramatist's genius and apprehension, the state of affairs ensues as the inevitable outcome of what has gone before. But to give such conviction to his ending the dramatist must have apprehended the fundamental principles conditioning the form of life he is displaying. In the history play, it is the welfare of a nation as a nation; that is, it is a specifically political interest. The ups and downs of England's national fortune in *King John* are not presented as a succession of chances. They are visible effects of operant causes shown in the action which is the play. Shakespeare's picture of Falconbridge is his first sketch of the forces which sway to its advantage the destiny of a nation. He is Shakespeare's first portrait of an unofficial statesman, a natural politician, a realization in untrammelled circumstance of such a figure as Bolingbroke would have been if he had not been called upon to play a part in tragedy.

Falconbridge does not hide the grounds of his political worth. More than once he himself expounds his own guiding principles; and the actions he instigates in the play are direct expressions of these principles. Expediency is his watchword: 'commodity the bias of the world.' An eye for the main chance, and utter immunity from every moral or decent scruple which might trammel one's freedom to perform the expedient act expeditiously: that is the secret of policy. Hence the enormous political advantage Falconbridge's unmoral personality is to him. It is he who suggests the entirely immoral but thoroughly effective truce between France and England for the reduction of Angiers, and he is delighted with its Machiavellian sufficiency—'smacks it not something of the policy?' The most cunning article of the truce he does not himself propose: it is a chance suggestion. But only he has the political acumen to recognize it. His scheme had been that 'by east and west' English and French should mount their battering cannon against Angiers. But the tactical disposition of their forces is determined by the leaders quite casually. John chooses the west, Austria the north, and France the south; and Falconbridge's aside as he hears the plan is ample testimony to his political genius:

> O prudent discipline. From north to south:
> Austria and France shoot in each other's mouth.
> I'll stir them to it.

He knows that the artillery of his day is variable in its range-finding; and rejoices that by inadvertent casualties there will be so many fewer French and Austrians to fight when the main

conflict is resumed. Only once in the whole play, and that towards the end, in sheer horror at Arthur's supposed murder, does Falconbridge utter a sentiment which appears to presuppose a conscience. But it is a politically safe sentiment; and perhaps, realizing how indispensably English Falconbridge had become, Shakespeare for common decency's sake lent him a proper moral cloak.

It is no doubt dangerous to attribute validity to opinions deduced from an artist's apprehension in a play which is only intermittently and dubiously artistic. The impression of Falconbridge's unscrupulousness as the main instrument of his political efficiency may proceed not from Shakespeare's intuitive and imaginative grasp of the life political: it may be no more than a casual prejudice. Even so, there is no room for doubt that his habitual view of the art of diplomacy was that it was an immoral game. Kings break faith upon commodity. John's pseudo-judicial determination of the Falconbridge heritage is a farcical travesty of justice:

> My mother's son did get your father's heir;
> Your father's heir must have your father's land.

And when the Dauphin has a faintly moral reluctance to enter into certain complicated political fetches, it is characteristically a high ecclesiastic who reproaches him for being so green and fresh in the ways of the world.

But if *King John*, by permitting a distinction between the craft of policy and the art of government, allows no unassailable ground for attributing to Shakespeare a distinctly contemptuous view of statesmen and statecraft, his two fully developed history-plays, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, make such an escape impossible. They are perhaps the only perfect specimens of a dramatic type which, even in an age of creative dramatists, only Shakespeare's genius could invent. They are not chronicle-pageants: they are not tragedies, nor are they comedies, though they come closer to comedy than to other recognized types, and indeed curiously so, since the traditional affinities of the chronicle play had been with tragedy. They are history-plays. A better name would be political plays, for they are plays in which the prevailing dramatic interest is in the fate of a nation. Since that is their nature, there will be in them much of what Shakespeare's insight had apprehended of the forces which shape a nation's destiny.

The plot of both of them is specifically political, and the nominal hero of each is elected to the office in his capacity as a political agent, a wielder of government. To an Elizabethan, the welfare of England was in the hands of its sovereign. These two history-plays are representations of two kings, each contributing his particular

service to the good of his country by virtue of his gifts, his principles, and his personality. At the end of them, England is what it has become in each, because this or that trait in its king has visibly produced these political consequences. They are, psychologically, studies in kings; but, dramatically, they are views of kingship.

It is plain to see what makes Henry IV an efficient governor. As a man, he is unattractive, cold, secretive. He can suppress or hide every tremor of personal sentiment and of natural instinct. Touches of nature are interspersed to diversify the portrait—the conflict, for instance, in Henry between the father and the king, and the elemental human torments such as sleeplessness, attacking the natural man through the strain imposed by the statesman. But these not only add lifelikeness to the picture; they emphasize the dramatic theme. It is Henry's political virtue that, up to the limit of all but simple physical necessity, he can always subdue the man to the official. He cloaks even the most natural impulses; on both occasions, for instance, when he talks as a father with his son, he has carefully secured privacy by dismissing all his attendants and counsellors. His life has been governed by policy. He has been eminently successful as a politician; he has led his country to larger prosperity. The public benefit ensuing from his achievement is clear in the sequence of events which make the play. Less obvious, but no less certain, is Henry's own single-mindedness in directing his policy to public good. When, unheard by the world, he is in intimate discourse with his offending son, his obsessing fear is that his son's dissipation will spell ruin for England:

> the fifth Harry from curb'd licence plucks
> The muzzle of restraint, and the wild dog
> Shall flesh his tooth on every innocent.
> O my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows!

The principles of policy by which Henry has conferred so much good on the nation are plain to be seen. Absolute expediency and resolute pragmatism. 'Are these things then necessities? Then let us meet them like necessities.' This, of course, means the suspension of all moral considerations except in so far as they may be tools of expediency. 'Nothing can seem foul to those that win.' The natural and the moral man must be overcome; all impulses of conscience and all promptings of humane instinct must be rigorously controlled, so that the perfect official, the ideal civil servant, may emerge. Such a victory has Henry won over himself.

The sources of his political worth are thrown into clearer light by dramatic comparison and contrast. He is set over against Hotspur, who, as a man, has the irresistible attractiveness of high-spirited nobility:

> no braver gentleman
> More active-valiant or more valiant-young,
> More daring or more bold, is now alive
> To grace this latter age with noble deeds.

But because he is so much at the mercy of his human and manly instincts, he is a complete political failure. He cannot govern, because he cannot control and organize even himself. Officially, he is a hare-brained Hotspur, governed by a spleen, or by a romantic sentiment. How complete is his failure to participate in corporate scheming is apparent even in his demeanour as a husband. Luckily for him, marriage is not entirely a political association, and may even yet be held fast by links of purely personal preference. Hotspur's shortcomings in regard to domestic strategy are insufficient to fracture a union welded so firmly by the devotion of a wife so strongly under the spell of his personality. But his heedlessness as she fondly and lengthily inquires for the cause of his distemperature; his indifference to her anxieties; his spasmodic awakening from brooding abstraction, but only to summon a servant for information about posts and horses; above all, the casual callousness of the notice he deigns in the end to give to her—'What say'st thou, my lady?'—these are enough to indicate Hotspur's ineptitude even in the politics of domesticity. He is always so passionately himself, and so enthusiastically the man, that he can never conduct himself as the unfailing official.

Falstaff, at first a mere unhistorical intruder strangely allowed entry into a history play, quickly asserts his right to a main role in the play's dramatic idea. He is the marvellous offspring of Shakespeare's full perception of the artistic affinity between history play and comedy. Comedy approaches life as something to be lived, and the living of it is a practical art. Falstaff's problem as a comic character is to maintain the corporation of Sir John. His task is of an order similar to Henry's political occupation to maintain the community of England. Falstaff's principles are Henry's, applied to the domain of private life. He fights no longer than he sees reason; for a comic hero endangers his professional qualification as a comic hero whenever he risks his life and hazards an uncovenanted tragic ending. He is neither brave nor cowardly, neither truthful nor a liar; for such moral distinctions do not exist in his world. Virtue for him is merely the ability to survive and succeed by the exercise of his capacity for overcoming all obstacles and for extricating himself from all dangers. Wit is his instrument, as a closely allied form of intellectual ingenuity, craft, is Henry's. And Falstaff's banishment of honour from his scale of values is no less necessary to his efficiency than is Henry's oblivion of it to his.

But of course Falstaff's task to be a man moving triumphantly amongst men does not require him to renounce his manhood. Indeed he must preserve in particular its primary elements, the qualities which pertain to the flesh. There are no more universal touches of nature; and they make Falstaff heartily welcome to all mankind. Henry has nothing but success in office to give him a hold on our regard. He remains outside our affection, a perfect politician.

In popular estimation Shakespeare's Henry V is probably a more perfect king than Henry IV. Admittedly he is a far more likeable fellow—once he has ceased to explain his wild oats. And what enterprises of kingship he undertakes he performs no less successfully than did his father. But Shakespeare can only allow him to purchase our personal affection by considerably reducing his duties as a king. His father had to exercise the whole art of government, maintaining peace at home and securing glory abroad. It was in the more exacting office of governing at home that his subtlest craft was needed. But Hal is largely relieved of these routine trials, and for the most part his kingship is circumscribed to military leadership. At the head of his army, in embarkation, in siege, and in battle, he treads the surest of traditional ways to popular acclamation. He is a great commander whose greatness as a king is tacitly and sentimentally assumed. In a field-command he can keep so much of the humanity he would perforce have to leave outside the door of civil office. Soldiers are much more obviously human than clerks of the Treasury.

But on the rare occasions when Hal is called upon for a definitely political decision, are the factors determining political wisdom different from what they were in his father's case? Hal's mode of leading his army to victory is his most obvious national asset. But it was, so to speak, a secondary achievement, and the good it did was entirely dependent on the prior decision to make war on France. The first scene of *Henry V*—a scene which critics curiously pass by—unmistakably deprives Hal of all personal credit for that decision. He is trapped into declaration of war by the machinations of a group of men whose sole and quite explicit motive is to preserve their own revenues; and the political implication is more flagrant in that these men are an ecclesiastical synod. Hal, in fact, owes his political achievement, not as did his father, to his own insight, but rather to something so near to intellectual dullness that it permits of his being jockeyed into his opportunities. He can be saved from such imputation only by the assumption that he saw through the bishops' subtlety and quietly used them as an excuse to embark on a foreign war with the idea of securing domestic

peace, even as his father in his dying words had advised him to do. But such Machiavellian astuteness does not fit in with the indubitable traits of Hal's nature. On one occasion, and on one occasion only, there is a faint suspicion of political sophistication. In the preceding play, Hotspur contributed to his own political ruin by a noble gesture of bravado. Too eager to await reinforcements, he joined immediate battle with the vaunt that the reduction of his forces

> lends a lustre and more great opinion
> A larger dare to our great enterprise.

As a moral attitude its effect is magnificent; as a political decision it is disastrous. But on a similar occasion, Henry V displays a like temper. When, on the night before Agincourt, Westmoreland wishes that they had but one ten thousand more recruits from England, Henry will have none of it.

> The fewer men, the greater share of honour,
> . . . Wish not a man from England.
> God's peace, I would not lose so great an honour
> As one man more methinks would share from me.

He exceeds Hotspur in moral generosity and in thirst for glory: he would even reduce the army he has:

> Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,
> That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
> Let him depart: his passport shall be made
> And crowns for convoy put into his purse—

and all because

> we would not die in that man's company
> That fears his fellowship to die with us.

But his gesture does not lead to defeat. It is not in fact a proclamation and a firm offer to the army. It is merely a remark to one of his chiefs of staff. Nor would there have been much opportunity for wholesale demobilization on the very eve of battle. The offer, which was no offer, was either a piece of strategy or the natural outcome of Henry's military enthusiasm. Either his guardian spirit once more urges Henry to make what, in spite of first appearances, proves in the end to be the politic move, or Henry is sounder in the theory of military numbers than he appears in this speech to be. There is more of the general's acumen in another of his battle-prayers:

> O God of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts,
> Possess them not with fear; take from them now
> The sense of reckoning, if the opposed numbers
> Pluck their hearts from them.

Altogether, then, the play of *Henry V* does not really imply substantial modifications in Shakespeare's apprehension of the political life. There remains in it the sense that what is good in the world of politics is entirely unrelated to and generally the opposite of what makes for goodness in the moral life. It is the distinction between Machiavelli's *virtu* and the moralist's virtue, or, as Mr. G. B. Shaw puts it, between virtue and goodness. But more of that later. Henry IV achieves political greatness and proves his political worth by the deliberate exercise of his political acumen: whence our coldness to him as a man. To a large extent, Henry V is thrust into political greatness by sheer instinct. His genius leads him to take steps his moral nature would have prohibited his taking; and his ingratiating commonplaceness of mind hides from him their immoral implications or even glosses them with conventional moral sanctions. He is secured in our affections, because he is dispensed by Shakespeare from requiring such intellectual greatness as his father had. He stands before us always as the great plain man, and there is a sort of gratification felt by Shakespeare, as by most of us, in installing the plain man in high political office. Illogical, it probably is; a mere gamble with fate. We trust that a blind instinct will prompt the plain man to do those things the competent politician would clearly see to be necessary; and we are willing to take our chance, though at such very long odds against us, because, as human beings and unpolitical animals, we prefer to sacrifice the probability of good government to secure ourselves against the fear of exploitation by the expert. A pledge to do nothing at all is not without advantages as an electioneering cry. Henry V wins our hearts as the greatest of plain men. His common text is that the king is but a man; that all his senses have but human conditions, and that, his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man. Note, however, how his guardian angel saw to it that he should preserve his incognito whilst preaching this sermon. Henry has all the admirable propensities of the average Englishman, his conventions, his manners, and his opportune lack of them, his prejudices, and even his faith. He would have welcomed Robinson Crusoe as a brother in God. In all except generalship, he is that most attractive and delightful being, the magnificent commonplace, and we needs must love the glorified image of ourselves.

Thus did Shakespeare sweeten the savour of the political life, without giving the lie to what he had apprehended of its sordid necessities. Though it may be largely hidden, the truth as Shakespeare grasped it, remains even in *Henry V*: the sense that not only is politics a nasty business, but that a repugnant unscrupulousness

is an invaluable asset in the art of government. That is the burden of the English History Plays, jubilant as they are in pride of country and of race.

But there is another, and a final, chapter to the story. There is *Julius Caesar*. Too often the Roman play is taken as a predecessor of *Hamlet* rather than as a successor of *Henry V*. Hence all the pother as to whether it is Caesar's tragedy, or Brutus's; and the consequent shifts to pad one or other of them into the shape and dimensions of a tragic hero. Nothing can raise Caesar to such a stature. Even his arrogance is palpably nearer to the ludicrousness of comedy than to the *hubris* of ancient tragedy, though doubtless it was Caesar's after-life in classical tragedy which suggested to Shakespeare the trait which best lent itself to the caricature his purpose required. Nor is Brutus really more amenable to the requirements of tragedy. Though Shakespeare is nearer to us than he is to Dante, for whom Brutus was Satan's chosen child, yet Shakespeare is not quite contemporary enough to assume that assassination is a virtue if only a muddle-headed notion of liberty is urged as its motive. It is impossible to fit *Julius Caesar* into Shakespeare's mode of tragedy; although it is natural to try to do so, since before Shakespeare, the Roman theme had never entered drama except as the stuff of tragedy. But Shakespeare occasionally ventured on artistic innovations. *Julius Caesar* is a history-play in exactly the same sense as are *Henry IV* and *Henry V*: that is, it is a political play.

It is the weakness of *Julius Caesar* as a history-play which really excites Mr. G. B. Shaw to wrath; and to find its generally accepted tragic imperfections in his indictment only means that when the game is Shakespeare-baiting, any sort of stick will do. But his serious complaint is its failure as a history-play. He has, however, a very curious notion that a history-play is a branch of science, not a form of art. The test of goodness he applies to it is its correspondence with recorded fact; it fails because Shakespeare's Caesar is quite unlike the man who was the Roman dictator. The assertion of Mr. Shaw the historian is as clearly right as the use of it by Mr. Shaw the critic is clearly irrelevant. Yet even on the point of fact he allows himself to lose something by a strange strategic blunder. Shakespeare's Caesar is not Julius Caesar, he holds, because it was not in Shakespeare to have an inkling of what the real Caesar was. That is an intelligible accusation. But then, 'it cost Shakespeare no pang to write Caesar down for the merely technical purpose of writing Brutus up' Mr. Shaw cannot have it both ways. He cannot adduce Shakespeare's portrait of Caesar as evidence that Shakespeare unsuccessfully tried to paint the real

Caesar, and also that, for purely theatrical and specious reasons, he did not try to paint the real Caesar. One or the other, maybe, but not both.

Perhaps Shakespeare is no less Shakespeare even though good grounds might be found to substantiate either of the charges as separate accusations. He certainly wrote Caesar down; that is, he drew a portrait in which he deliberately belittled the figure he found in Plutarch. But did he do so 'for the merely technical purpose of writing Brutus up?' And because he did so, is it to be safely concluded that it was not in Shakespeare to understand the rare type of man who is a Caesar.

It is perhaps not always remembered how very far down Shakespeare did write Caesar. His first words strike the key-note of the quality the dramatist is compelling him to assume. With the natural jester Casca to bluster as officious and unofficial usher, he uses the voice of majesty and the publicity of a ceremonial occasion for conveying to Calpurnia a gynaecological hint any ordinary fellow would have spoken of to his wife in the privacy of their dressing-room. This Caesar has been a consummate play-actor with the forum for his stage and the world for his theatre. But his mastery is failing him. He feels that the attitudes, the gestures, and the clichés are no longer as compelling as they were. Seeking to give them their former might, he exaggerates and over-acts them. He seizes all and every the most unsuitable occasion to try them out, to keep his hand in by rehearsing at every opportunity. The magnificent histrionic genius by which he has secured dominion over mankind now lacks its informing inspiration. Weakened by his fears, he himself is the slave of the theatrical technique he has hitherto employed as a born artist. He is as pathetic as a decrepit tragedian painfully strutting and squeakily mouthing it, as in the delirium of dotage he acts over again the triumphs of his prime. At times, his postures reflect something of the old glory; at moments his voice catches the old magisterial note. But the effort is always apparent, the striving to recover and maintain the pose. So after plainly revealing his fears to Antony, he pulls himself together:

> I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd
> Than what I fear,

and then to the most impressive of former postures—'for always I am Caesar.' But the strain is too much; the attitude is no more than a moment's display. It shrivels into the tell-tale confession—'Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf.' If this is not a picture of Mommsen's Caesar, it is at least a possible portrait of the latter

end of Shaw's Caesar. It shows him, not in the prime of his amorous gallivantings and conquering expeditions, but in the intimacies of his premature senility.

There is only one scene in which a more intimate and a domestic 'close-up' view of Caesar is shown. But it is a complete exposure of his character as it suited Shakespeare to present it. We are in the privacy of Caesar's home. It is midnight. There is incessant thunder and lightning. Caesar, who in the old military days could snatch an hour's sleep in any sort of a hole, cannot now rest even in his comfortable bed at the proper time of sleeping. He is pacing the corridors of his house, clad only in his nightgown. He is distraught: not perhaps quite as indifferent to risks of pneumonia as he seems, for in Shakespeare's English a nightgown is not a night-shirt, but a dressing-gown. Still, Caesar is manifestly distraught. His teeth chatter, his hair stands on end, he is a nervous wreck. All, apparently, because his wife has had nightmare. He will have the priests' auguries at once, unable to possess himself in patience until the normal opening-hour of these distinguished civil servants' offices. Enter Calpurnia, who may have had nightmare, and indeed had ample warrant for it, but who, once properly awake, has all the *savoir-faire* and common-sense efficiency which Caesar lacks. She rules this failing giant with the knowing strategy, the tactful wheedling, and the no less absolute authority of a perfect nurse. She comes to him with a playful phrase—'going out, Caesar?' One must remember that it is midnight, a storm is raging, and Caesar shivers in a dressing-gown. Then the blunt ultimatum—'no going out to-day for you.' Caesar's reply is the most pathetic of his utterances in the whole play. Here he stands, consumed with fear, in the privacy of his own house, with no audience but his own wife, and he puts on the full pomp and all the bombast of his strongest forensic turn. 'Caesar shall forth . . .', and so on. Calpurnia (to whom incidentally no actress will ever do justice until the tradition of taking her for a weak, puling creature goes the way of all other anti-feminist prejudices) sees that his nerves are much worse than usual. Perhaps it will be better to humour him by playing up to his mood. So, to make success on the one important point certain, to ensure his staying indoors, she harrows him with fear, tactfully, but with no half-measure. Yet it is at moments of most obvious distress that Caesar tries his histrionic recoveries most pertinaciously:

> What can be avoided
> Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?
> Yet Caesar shall forth, for these predictions
> Are to the world in general as to Caesar.

His last line at once suggests to Calpurnia another mode of dealing with his mood: she plays up to his pride:

> When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
> The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.

But Caesar is so far excited now that even customary sedatives fail. He still will go: 'Cowards die many times before their death', and he gathers himself into his most majestic posture:

> Of all the wonders that I yet have heard
> It seems to me most strange that men should fear,
> Seeing that death, a necessary end,
> Will come when it will come.

But, unluckily for the success of the illusionist's turn, there is, so to speak, an accident. In the very moment of his announcing his superb indifference to mortal perturbations, there is a noise behind him. Turning with a start, he sees that it is merely his messenger: but with irrepressible excitement, this monument of supernatural placidity breathlessly blurts out—'What say the augurers?' (that is, is there really anything in my fears?) The augury is in fact bad. But Caesar now has not only a solitary listener; the addition of the messenger provides him with an audience. Fronting Calpurnia *and* the messenger, he can keep up his theatrical mannerisms:

> Danger knows full well
> That Caesar is more dangerous than he.
> We are two lions litter'd in one day,
> And I the elder and more terrible.

Unconscious burlesque never outdid itself more flagrantly. Calpurnia is driven to her sublest counterstroke. By mere instinct she sees the way out: she gives Caesar the safe excuse she knows he will seize with avidity—

> call it my fear,
> That keeps you in the house, and not your own.

The victory is won. Without even the slightest pretence at saving appearances, Caesar jumps at the pretext:

> Mark Antony shall say I am not well,
> And for thy humour, I will stay at home.

But so far has he lost his cunning that now he cannot even relapse effectively. He destroys whatever semblance of sincerity his compliance to Calpurnia's fears had had by a fresh outbreak when Decius enters to fetch him to the senate-house. Not a word of his not being well, but some of his stagiest heroics:

> Tell them I will not come to-day;
> Cannot is false; and that I dare not, falser.

Calpurnia, of course, recognizes the sublime silliness of it, and once more seeks to save the situation with the proper aside to Decius—

'say he is sick.' But Caesar has wound himself up for his tricks: 'shall Caesar send a lie?' No one is deluded; and Decius politely but firmly tells Caesar that he must offer a reason which at least sounds sensible. How wise Calpurnia was becomes even clearer; for exactly as she planned, Caesar now tells Decius that his real reason is Calpurnia's nerves. But Decius, who of course wants Caesar in the senate-house as much as Calpurnia wants him at home, tries to overcome Calpurnia's stratagems with her own device: he plays on Caesar's superstition. He succeeds—for Caesar is at the mercy of those who have the last word with him: 'you have well expounded' the omens. Nothing more is necessary but to push the appeal to Caesar's pride, and he gives in at once—but with a phrase which leaves him not a vestige of decency nor a shred of dignity: he puts all on to Calpurnia:

> How foolish do your fears seem now, Calpurnia.
> I am ashamed I did yield to them.

There is no doubt at all about it: Shakespeare wrote Caesar as far down as any traditional character could be written down. But why assume that he did it 'to write Brutus up'? His Brutus is not in fact, 'written up' in the same sense that Caesar is written down. That is, Plutarch's Brutus is at least as noble in soul as is Shakespeare's, whereas Shakespeare's Caesar is a pygmy to Plutarch's. Brutus is no more significant in the play than is Hotspur in *Henry IV*, and the parts of both in the dramatic economy are very similar. Why, then, do Shakespeare's portraits of an English and of a Roman ruler differ so greatly? England was in Shakespeare's blood; its past was his past, and its kings were the sacred instruments who had shaped its destiny. But what could Caesar possibly have been to him? What was Rome? For Shakespeare Rome was a chapter of the past, dead and done with this many a year, and now securely bound within the covers of Plutarch. Shakespeare could see it calmly, impersonally, and without racial prejudice. And the sight of it must have prompted a political idea which finds no place whatever in the English history-plays. Is it likely, indeed is it even possible, that any one man, merely by virtue of his superiority to other men, could ever have secured such dominion over mankind as Caesar secured? The interpretation of the fate of nations as the direct outcome of the personality of its governor, a view accepted instinctively and unquestioningly in the English histories, is palpably inadequate to account for Rome and the Empire. The course of civilization is determined, and, in *Julius Caesar*, mainly determined, by factors independent of a ruler's personality. Caesar the man and Caesar the politician are written down to zero in order that mightier and utterly impersonal forces

may be shown in operation. The powers which are spontaneously generated when men group themselves or grow into societies, powers which only when they have prevailed are recognized and given names, discussed and documented as ideals or systems or principles, but which indeed are subtler, more mysterious, and mightier forces than the phase of them which can be analysed and labelled as political shibboleths: such irresistible and elusive influences, for instance, as the Zeitgeist, the notion which is borne down the wind, these are the instruments determining the fate of Rome as it is unrolled in *Julius Caesar*. Caesar is written down that Caesarism may be written up. *Julius Caesar* is Shakespeare's profoundest political or history play.

Hence, even more than do the English histories, it points to the inadequacy of the traditional title of the genre, the history-play. Such a title invites the irrelevant criticism that Caesar in the play does not correspond with Mommsen's. But how could he? The dramatist universalizes the particular; he presents the permanent elements behind the transitory features of a particular epoch, and to do so, he is perforce laying hold of what without straining words may properly be called the principles of government. A history-play is primarily a political play.

There is particular irony, therefore, in Mr. Shaw's attack on *Julius Caesar*. He blames Shakespeare for not apprehending the political world as a Carlylean product of his 'hero'. Shakespeare had in truth been grasping history exactly in that Carlylean way in all his English history-plays. In them, also, his sense of the historical 'hero', that is, the efficient politician, had been very close indeed, *mutatis mutandis*, to Mr. Shaw's notion of Caesar. Henry IV is not a Caesar; but, within the limits of his capacity, his ruling principles are precisely those attributed to Caesar by Mr. Shaw. 'Having virtue, he has no need of goodness.' 'He is neither frank, forgiving, nor generous.' In Mr. Shaw's sense, he is completely selfish; that is, he allows neither prejudice nor creed nor ideal to interrupt him in doing each moment exactly what his political cunning sees to be expedient. Shakespeare's early governors are almost incredibly Shavian. His Caesar is not. But that is because in the meantime Shakespeare's political apprehension had widened. And so we have the amusing situation of an inveterate individualist like Shakespeare being castigated for seeing history socialistically, by a socialist who insists that history is entirely made by individuals. However, as generally happens when an author is really an artist, his preface is of no moment and his plays are the thing. Shaw's criticism of Shakespeare's Caesar is neither here nor there: his *Caesar and Cleopatra* is ample compensation for his heresy.

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Some Thoughts on *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

By

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SOME THOUGHTS ON 'THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE'

'Art is logic, Nature incoherency.'
—HARDING in *Sister Teresa* (George Moore).

I

WHEN I first read Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, I was profoundly moved. In its depth and purity the pity evoked was beyond anything I had ever experienced before, and in its idealistic quality was to be paralleled only in two of Hardy's other novels, in *King Lear*, in *Othello*, and perhaps also in Goethe's *Iphigenie*. Michael Henchard, the Mayor, seemed to me a colossal figure—a tragic protagonist who, for sheer reality at least, was worthy to rank with Shakespeare's greatest characters. When I came to read the critics I found that more than one shared my admiration for Henchard—declaring him to be Hardy's greatest male character. R. L. Stevenson, in a congratulatory letter to the author, pronounced the mayor 'a great fellow'. And my own subsequent readings of the novel have convinced me not only on this point of characterization, but in my feeling that there are qualities in this novel which will yield profitable results to a more searching criticism than has hitherto been brought to bear upon it.

I have begun this essay on a personal note because the emotional appeal of a work of art is necessarily a personal matter before, and sometimes even after, the universal canons of criticism and taste have been applied. This personal appeal is, as it were, the first dry test in the analytical process; although paradoxically a certain wetness about the eyes of the literary analyst gives him a greater zest for the more thorough examination which follows. Indeed, to determine the legitimate emotional appeal of a work of art is perhaps the chief aim of all judicious criticism; for the purely intellectual content is significant only in so far as it is contributory to the dominant emotional theme. In this respect, the brilliant studies of Lionel Johnson, Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, and Mr. H. C. Duffin have already practically assured for Hardy a very high place among the world's novelists. But still it cannot be denied that there are dissentients, many of whom have uttered vigorous and plausible animadversions which call for some consideration.

The Mayor of Casterbridge, in particular, has been the object of at least one serious attack in print. And Hardy himself seems to have

felt some uneasiness about this novel. In *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* we find the following jotting made on January 22nd, 1886:[1]

> The Mayor of Casterbridge begins to-day in the Graphic newspaper and Harper's Weekly.—I fear it will not be so good as I meant, *but after all, it is not improbabilities of incident but improbabilities of character that matter*. . . .

I would ask my reader to bear in mind the two aspects of this remark; first, the stricture; and second, the qualification of that stricture.

A few pages farther on we find this:

> The Mayor of Casterbridge . . . was a story which Hardy fancied he had damaged more recklessly as an artistic whole, in the interest of the newspaper in which it appeared serially, than perhaps any other of his novels, his aiming to get an incident into almost every week's part causing him in his own judgement to add events to the narrative somewhat too freely. However, as at this time he called his novel-writing 'mere journeywork' he cared little about it as art, though it must be said in favour of the plot, *as he admitted later*, that it was quite coherent and organic, in spite of its complication. And others thought better of it than he did himself. . . .

Then follows R. L. Stevenson's letter of congratulation.

It is significant to notice in these two passages that although the self-depreciation is real, it is in each case followed by a qualification which is equally explicit. And the admission that he regarded his novel-writing as 'mere journeywork' is not to be taken too seriously by the critic. Even if we concede that Hardy was primarily a poet, and that he actually wrote his novels with the nonchalance which Shakespeare seems to have shown in and about many of his plays, it cannot be denied that this 'journeywork' of Hardy's compels a keener scrutiny than the more divinely inspired efforts of most other latter-day novelists. On the other hand it is self-evident that when a novelist confesses himself 'willing, and indeed anxious, to give up any points which may be desirable in a story when read as a whole, for the sake of others which shall please those who read it in numbers'—there is a serious risk that the artistic balance of the work will be impaired. That is a conclusion at which at least one critic has arrived with respect to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. But unfortunately this critic's [2] passion for denunciation would seem to have carried him a little too far. Whatever truth there may be in his strictures, I believe it will be patent to many that a still greater truth has been left unsaid. It is with the desire to supply this de-

[1] *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy*, by Florence Emily Hardy (Macmillan, 1928).

[2] J. W. Beach. *See* p. 7 of this essay.

ficiency that I have undertaken the following examination. I attempt no final pronouncement; but I at least hope to show that the necessity of serial publication was, perhaps, not so destructive of this novel 'as an artistic whole' as Hardy sometimes feared, or as some others have too blatantly contended.

. . .

Mr. Arnold Bennett, acute critic no less than creative artist, has given us in his book *The Author's Craft* three fundamental rules of design for the novel which seem to me incontrovertible, and which certainly form an excellent basis for the critical examination of any work of fiction. The first rule states that in the novel the interest must be centralized; the second states that the interest must be maintained; the third states that the plot must be kept throughout in the same convention. Elementary rules?—admittedly so; but (as Mr. Bennett has pointed out) capable of revealing serious flaws in the work of some of the most powerful writers, including Meredith, Tolstoy, and Dostoievsky. Let us apply these tests to Hardy's novel.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the interest is effectively centralized. Michael Henchard is the chief character; the concentration on him is uninterrupted, and every other interest in the book is entirely subservient to our prime interest in him. There are eight other considerable characters, two of which, Farfrae and Henchard's step-daughter, Elizabeth-Jane, are in every sense finished portraits, while two more, Mrs. Henchard (Susan) and Lucetta Templeman, are distinctly 'major' in their relation to the plot; but never for a moment is any one of these characters thrust forward impertinently or allowed to assume an importance purely on his own account. In their dealings with Henchard they are the human instruments of Fate; they are indeed (to change the figure) as beams of light projected upon a sombre landscape, in the midst of which the gaunt form of the protagonist stands out with Rembrandtesque vividness. This effect of chiaroscuro and subordination has been achieved with remarkable subtlety. The handling of Farfrae is particularly fine—a masterpiece of artistic restraint. Considered as a man, and even as a type of Scot, he is a vital and convincing character. He is, moreover, the person in the story who exerts the most profound influence upon the character and destiny of Henchard. Yet his entrances are contrived with rigid economy. He is passive, unassuming; yet he cannot be classed with Susan and Elizabeth-Jane as a mere colourless nonentity. Wherever he goes he radiates personality, and even in his absence he produces the impression of an uncanny natural force working calmly and unconsciously. He is reserved, self-centred, never deliberately aggressive; yet he could

not have wrought greater havoc on another man's life and property if he had been a tornado. It is true that to the reader he is not specially likable: to some he will seem insipid, almost a prig. But that perhaps is as it should be. Hardy would have us see him *indirectly*, through the eyes of Henchard. It is enough that we should be able to perceive and understand the more favourable impression which Farfrae makes upon the other characters.

A similar restraint is to be found in the portrayal of Elizabeth-Jane; although this character is artistically not so successful as Farfrae. Like other of Hardy's simple rustic types, she has the quality of self-effacement to an almost unnatural degree. I refer particularly to her timid retirement from the battle with Lucetta for Farfrae's love. Elizabeth's sexual emotions are anaemic; but she is by no means devoid of personality. Her affection for her mother; her faithfulness to the memory of the genial sailor, Newson; her modesty; her love of culture; her respect for her elders; her unfailing courtesy and kindliness towards inferiors; her stoic acceptance of the rubs of life—all these qualities inform her comely figure with a tender charm which amply justifies her step-father's tardy infatuation. In effect, I am inclined to believe that the reticence in her character is largely due to a purposeful reticence in the delineation. Although radically different from Farfrae, she is, like him, a contrast and a foil to Henchard. Had the novelist made the two subordinate characters on more robustious lines, more individual and arresting, our additional interest in *them* would have detracted seriously from the vigorous isolation of the protagonist.

Of Mrs. Henchard and Lucetta, the two persons of the drama who rank next in importance, it may be said that they are less vital and less intrinsically interesting than the two I have just considered. Throughout the story, Farfrae and Elizabeth exert a steady personal influence, for better or worse, on the 'unruly volcanic stuff' in Henchard's nature; whereas Susan and Lucetta are introduced rather to supply him with motives and opportunities for characteristic action. Henchard's interest in these two persons was mainly factitious; and by a legitimate dispensation of dramatic art (for Hardy's method is essentially dramatic) the claim they make upon the attention of the reader is correspondingly modified. Of Mrs. Henchard, as a character, perhaps the only thing that can be said is that she is adequate. Lucetta is drawn with a freer hand. She is a real woman, from her weakness for letter-writing and posing to the sincerity and anxiety of her love for Farfrae. Her colouring is, perhaps, a little hectic; but the blemishes in her make-up are never sufficient to impair the general effect. These two complete

the number of major characters—people whose relations with Henchard are steadily maintained. The remaining four of those whom I have termed 'considerable' are the furmity-woman, Jopp, Newson, and Abel Whittle. They are all clearly sketched with that exquisite virtuosity which none but the master of fiction can lavish upon his minor characters. Whenever they are on the stage they claim our respect as creatures of flesh and blood; but their especial quality is the fitness with which they play their part in the evolution of the central tragic idea.

Arnold Bennett's second rule of design for the novel states that the interest must be maintained: 'It may increase, but it must never diminish.' To maintain this interest in the less exacting type of reader is a task which the poorest writer of ephemeral fiction can usually perform with remarkable ease. But the novelist of genius, manipulating his greater mass of material, probing more deeply into the motives of thought and action, and aiming at a more truthful presentation of life in all its variety and complexity—a Tolstoy, a Dostoievsky, a Dickens, or a Meredith—is frequently seduced by the very richness of his invention, so that his work loses something of its dramatic quality—that progressive intensity and steady concentration on a clearly defined theme without which the most powerful cumulative effect is impossible. Then again, as Mr. E. M. Forster[1] has pointed out, the interest in a novel frequently lags towards the end for the simple reason that the author, through sheer exhaustion, has himself lost much of his initial enthusiasm for his characters, and is therefore obliged to round off their history with a riot of meretricious juggling, in the midst of which the artistic illusion perishes. Neither of these faults is to be found in the best novels of Hardy. On the other hand, it has been urged with considerable plausibility that in the novel under examination the serial writer's desire to hold the attention of the undiscerning magazine readers of 1886 has led him into the aesthetic crime of sacrificing spiritual issues to a purely physical sensationalism; that a reader who has been educated up to the standard of, say, a Henry James novel is unable to believe in the reality of Hardy's creatures beyond a certain point. This view has been vigorously expressed by an American critic, J. W. Beach, in his book entitled *The Technique of Thomas Hardy* (1922). Now the fact that Hardy made large and too generous concessions to the readers of *The Graphic* is undeniable. Even if his own confession had been wanting, the somewhat degrading truth would have been made abundantly clear by a book published in 1928—*Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel*, by

[1] *Some Aspects of the Novel* (1927).

Ellen Mary Chase. In this work the author has been at great pains to collate and compare the serial version with the later book version, and has shown how the cruder and more melodramatic passages in the former have been either entirely cut or considerably modified in the latter; how certain concessions to the prudery of the age have been withdrawn; how the characters of Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae have been improved in subtlety and truth; in short, how the artist, no longer harassed by the magazine readers, took over and completed the work which they had unconsciously interrupted.[1] Economic considerations led Hardy to declare that for a time at least he wished to be accounted 'a good hand at a serial'—a saying which may perhaps be paralleled by the *implicit* confession of Shakespeare that he (the 'self-honoured, self-secure') earnestly wished to be considered 'a good hand' at popular drama, and was therefore not averse to popping heroine after heroine into trunk-hose or piling corpse upon corpse in the fifth act of a tragedy as a concession to the interests of his company. It is no doubt a sad thing to see Genius stooping too low to conquer; on the other hand it may be held that a certain measure of popular success does serve—is, perhaps, necessary—to educe a man's greatest powers. By the act of condescension some divine qualities may be lost—certainly not all. And to return to our question of 'interest', few critics, I believe, would go so far as to assert that the complication of the plot in our novel was due to either fatigue or a lack of the higher imagination. To quote once more Hardy's own words, 'it is not improbabilities of incident but improbabilities of character that matter'; and in this latter respect the novel is irreproachable. The plot, moreover, in spite of its complication, remains 'quite coherent and organic'. And Hardy, so far from showing signs of a waning interest in his characters, seems deliberately to withhold

[1] This book is published by the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. The following are some of Hardy's alterations:

(1) In the serial version, Henchard's friendship with Lucetta began as follows: When landing from the packet steamer in Jersey he slipped, struck his head, and fell unconscious into the sea. Lucetta dived in and saved him—in gratitude for which action he promised to marry her. In the book version the events are more natural: Henchard falls ill at his hotel; Lucetta nurses him; intimate relations ensue and the woman is compromised.

(2) The one episode in the novel which, in spite of its adroit handling, I have always felt to be extraneous—that in which Henchard rescues Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane from the bull—is actually *three times longer in the serial version.*

(3) In the serial, Lucetta's preparations to meet Henchard secretly in the Ring are described with an excess of histrionic detail. In the novel, however, the passage is terse and effective. Again, in the serial, Farfrae melodramatically breaks in upon the meeting between his wife and her former lover, and even walks back to town with them without recognizing the veiled woman as his wife. This intrusion by Farfrae was omitted in the book version.

his tremendous passion till the end, when, in the last testament of Michael Henchard (as in the last paragraph of *Tess*), it breaks out in bitter cynicism and irony. J. W. Beach finds in this novel everything 'so disposed that the interest shall never lag'. I will go a step farther and say that the interest actually increases: though I shall make some attempt hereafter to refute this critic's accusation of superficiality and sensationalism.

The third and last important rule of design states that the plot should be kept throughout in the same convention. 'A convention is essential; and the duty of the novelist is to be true within his chosen convention, and no farther.' Hardy's position with regard to this rule has been so admirably stated by Mr. Bennett that I must quote him again: 'Thomas Hardy has been arraigned for the conventionalism of his plots. And yet Hardy happens to be one of those rare novelists who have evolved a new convention to suit their idiosyncrasy. Hardy's idiosyncrasy is a deep conviction of the whimsicality of the divine power. . .' An interesting passage to compare with these opinions is the following from *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* (a note-book jotting, dated June 3, 1882):

> As, in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is, quite accurately, a going to Nature; yet the result is no mere photograph, but purely the product of the writer's own mind.

All this is undoubtedly true; and if it is equally true that idiosyncrasy is an integral part of genius, and that a novelist without a certain idiosyncrasy is a novelist without originality, then Hardy has nothing to lose by the admission. Hence, the Wherefore being duly settled, he stands or falls by our examination of the How. And I think it will be found that as Sophocles in *Oedipus*, Shakespeare in *Macbeth*, Swift in *Gulliver*, and Barrie in *Dear Brutus* are all *true* within their chosen conventions, so Hardy in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is consistently true within the tragic and fatalistic convention which gives a philosophic unity to all his novels of Character and Environment.

Having briefly considered the fundamental structure, we may proceed now to the 'vital tissue' or what may be termed the textural qualities of the novel. Of these qualities the pervasive beauty of the rural setting is one of the most attractive. Critics have already spoken of the Chorus of Nature in Hardy's cosmic drama; and to me this signifies the tragic poet's conception of the external world, in all its primeval grandeur, as intimately and mysteriously related

to a cognate growth called elemental humanity. That all life is rooted in the soil, and that the roots of mankind are in some occult way intertwined with those of 'mute insensate things' appears to be the idea underlying Hardy's symbolism.[1] This symbolism is nowhere specifically affirmed, but the exquisite example in *The Woodlanders* is surely significant. And herein Hardy shows some affinity to Wordsworth. He lacks Wordsworth's faith and optimism, but on the other hand he is far removed from the uncompromising pessimism of a poet like Alfred de Vigny, to whom Nature was hateful by reason of its cold insensibility. To Hardy, Nature and Man seem to share a common fate; but to the French poet Nature seems frankly inimical:

> On me dit une mère et je suis une tombe.[2]

The conclusion that we draw from the Wessex drama is that Nature is certainly womb no less than tomb, nurse no less than destroyer. And the second line of that noble couplet in which de Vigny expresses his defiance of Nature:

> Plus que tout votre règne et que ses splendeurs vaines
> *J'aime la majesté des souffrances humaines. . . .*

might well have been the utterance of Egdon Heath or the Frome valley. Hence we find that the arena chosen for the Hardian representation of the ancient and interminable struggle between the forces of Good and Evil is the natural one, where the issue may be watched by the Spirit of the Pities and the Spirit of the Years with something approaching detachment—the broad sweeps of heath, the rich tracts of meadowland, the hills, the woods, and the dusty roads along which the weary fighters trek from battle to battle. We see, moreover, that in spite of the classical austerity of his style, Hardy the novelist is, in spirit and manner, a great Romantic. Like Wordsworth's poetry, the Wessex drama is the perfect fulfilment of Blake's prophetic dictum:

> Great things are seen when men and mountains meet;
> This is not done by jostling in the street.

The influence of environment upon the characters in the novels has already inspired much interesting criticism. This influence, however, is really a subtle essence which, like the spirit of poetry itself, defies analysis. It is the artistic reflex of the powerful impression made upon the poet by the scenes and associations of his

[1] This principle is also illustrated in many of Hardy's poems; for example, 'The Convergence of the Twain', and 'In a Wood'. Again, see *Early Life*, p. 150: 'I sometimes look upon all things in inanimate Nature as pensive mutes.'

[2] 'La Maison du berger.'

own early life. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* there is nothing to match the sublime characterization of Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*; but that is at least partly due to the fact that in *The Mayor* the tragic interest is more exclusively concentrated on humanity itself as embodied in a single representative protagonist. Nevertheless, our novel contains many fine examples of landscape and local features which, in the true Greek manner, act as a sensible chorus to the human drama—now offering a poignant comparison, now a harsh contrast: at one time sympathetic and almost expressing divine love; at another time inimical, perverse, ironical, and eloquent of divine callousness. It is the expression through Things of those cosmic ideas which in *The Dynasts* are more completely expressed through Spirits. The Ring at Casterbridge, an ancient Roman amphitheatre in which the forefathers of Solomon Longways and Christopher Coney had watched many a fierce gladiatorial combat, was, indeed, the fittest place for those ominous nocturnal meetings between Henchard and his two women.[1] The banks of the river skirting the north-eastern limits of the town embodied the mournful phases of Casterbridge life, whereas the south avenues embodied its cheerful moods. And as further examples of apposite setting—places pregnant with the psychic influence of past associations—consider the two bridges, which served as retreats for two distinct types of unfortunate denizens: the hissing turmoil of waters at Ten Hatches, whither Henchard retired to meditate in the moment of spiritual darkness; the decadent purlieus of Mixen Lane, which nourished and sheltered the lower instincts in those who lacked social anchorage.

We find, also, a converse principle at work—a principle which is entirely compatible with the dictum that Art is Logic. Hardy, above all other novelists I know, has the remarkable power of investing the forms of external nature with a new physiognomy in accordance with spiritual issues working themselves out in the mind of Man. In this process, moreover, the calm everyday aspect of things, so far from being lost or impaired, is actually heightened and magnified. An excellent example is to be found in the very first chapter of *The Mayor*. The disillusionment, ennui, and 'stale familiarity' of the hay-trusser and his wife, as they plod wearily along the dusty road leading to Weydon Priors, are exactly mirrored in the blackened-green vegetation of the late-summer countryside, the silence of which is broken only by 'the voice of a weak bird

[1] In *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy*, occurs the note: 'An object or mark raised or made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature' (p. 153).

singing a trite old evening song that might doubtless have been heard on the hill at that same hour, and with the self-same trills, quavers, and breves, at any sunset of that season for centuries untold.'[1] But the principle is even more fundamental; for the main spiritual issues in this novel derive directly from the clash and contrast between two disparate groups of people: on the one hand the polished, urbane Farfrae and the sophisticated, theatrical Lucetta; on the other hand the amorphous, elemental Henchard and his simple, unassuming step-daughter. Now in order to provide a suitable stage for this drama, Hardy in some measure renounced his partiality for open spaces and confined the greater part of the action within the narrow limits of a small town; but this town, while faithfully preserving the characteristics of early-Victorian Dorchester,[2] is specifically represented as being a place of work and domiciliation hardly different from the surrounding country—the complement, and not the urban opposite, of the rural life. Tenderly poetical is the passage in which this homogeneity of atmosphere is most vividly described:

> Bees and butterflies in the cornfields at the top of the town, who desired to get to the meads at the bottom, took no circuitous course but flew straight down High Street without any apparent consciousness that they were traversing strange latitudes. And in Autumn airy spheres of thistledown floated into the same street, lodged upon the shop fronts, blew into drains; and innumerable tawny and yellow leaves skimmed along the pavement and stole through people's doorways, with a hesitating scratch on the floor like the skirts of timid visitors.[3]

In this way the novelist has prepared a *décor* which serves at once as a foil and a natural setting to each group of characters; furthermore, by laying his scene in such a town, he is able to utilize the greater rapidity and concentration of the urban life without sacrificing the spaciousness and imaginative possibilities of the countryside. And when the battle has been waged, and the 'clubbable' Farfrae has finally ousted Henchard from the town society for which he was temperamentally unfitted, it is natural that the latter should retire once more to the unequivocal fields and hedges of the rough open-air life which, from the cradle, had moulded his stubborn character.

But in this work it is not only the stable and permanent features of external nature which serve as a choral commentary on the progress of the drama. The march of seasons; the numerous shifting

[1] Macmillan's Pocket Edition, p. 3.
[2] 'Dorchester is touched in with the hand of a master' (R. L. Stevenson).
[3] Macmillan's Pocket Edition, p. 68.

phases of earth and sky—sunlight, moonlight, starlight; the transitory elements—dew, fog, wind, rain, and cloud—these also are endowed with an active personality, and sometimes play their part in the great game with an almost human zest. The rain that spoilt Henchard's celebrations was something more than ordinary kill-joy rain. As it streams off the useless tea-tables and drips embrowned from the hams at the tops of the greasy poles, it seems to possess the devastating qualities of vitriol. It is literally a 'smiting of earth by heaven', and its malign aspect is entirely due to our inordinate sympathy with the mayor in his acute discomfiture; indeed, we are not conscious of the intense actuality of this man's character until the occurrence of that minor calamity. And later on we are affected in the same way by that wind which comes as vaunt-courier to another disastrous downpour—the wind that 'rubbed people's faces like a damp flannel'[1] just before the uncertain harvest. Characteristic, too, is that simile of the damp flannel, conveying as it does, in a few words, the truth of a natural phenomenon and the insolence of a mocking emissary of Fate.

In these examples the forces of nature are perverse, as if suborned by the powers of darkness—a fact which is quite in keeping with the tragic convention. But this mood is not unrelieved. When Lucetta starts out to meet Henchard at the Ring, hoping to persuade him to return to her the letters with which he had threatened to destroy her happiness, 'the sun was resting on the hill like a drop of blood on an eyelid.'[2] Mr. H. C. Duffin has pronounced this simile unlovely.[3] It may be; but it reveals what may be termed a physico-pathetic approximation of a natural phase to the mood of the characters, which is extremely effective. The emotions of the reader are keyed up to the right pitch in anticipation of an approaching crisis.

The Chorus of Nature finds its human complement in the rustic characters who haunt the second-rate inn, 'The Three Mariners'. Solomon Longways, Christopher Coney, Buzzford, and Mrs. Cuxom are cast in the same mould as the rustics in the other great novels, and they are second to none. They are vehicles of the same gentle humour and lambent satire. Their naive comments on the doings of the chief characters are accompanied by the same comic head-shaking, pot-swilling, and staring at a fixed point in space. They make their presence felt, but never obtrusively; tempting as the material must have been, the novelist avoids over-elaboration.

[1] ibid., p. 228. Equally fine is the simile which characterizes perfectly the deceptive sunlight. Indeed, the whole paragraph is a masterpiece of description.

[2] ibid., p. 301.

[3] *A Study of the Wessex Novels* (1919).

They are exhilarating company, for humble as they are, they allow themselves a chartered liberty of thought and speech; and yet they pursue the noiseless tenor of their way in a state of resigned contentment such as no mere worldly prosperity could ever bestow. Like their prototypes in George Eliot, they frequently give utterance to sentiments in which humour and pathos are quietly blended. For instance, after the burial of Mrs. Henchard, Christopher Coney, having dug up the four pennies placed on the dead woman's eyes, has ruthlessly converted them into small beer at 'The Three Mariners'. Solomon Longways tells the others, who at once deprecate the action as 'cannibal'. But Solomon can see no 'treason' in it. 'Money is scarce', he says, 'and throats get dry. Why should death rob life of fourpence?' Then Mrs. Cuxom adds her plaintive monody: 'Well, poor soul; she's helpless to hinder that or anything now. And all her shining keys will be took from her, and her cupboards opened; and little things a' didn't wish seen anybody will see; and her wishes and ways will all be as nothing.'[1] This surely is no whit inferior to Mrs. Quickly on the death of Falstaff.

I have heard one or two confirmed townsmen remark that these countrymen of Hardy's are not true to nature. Most readers will find that they are, in the aesthetic sense, absolutely right. They ring true because the poet (the word slips out)—the poet knows how to convey with spontaneous ease the imaginative impression which is the result of many years of direct intercourse. By applying the artistic principle of selection and condensation, Hardy has given us the very genius of rustic idiosyncrasy. Humour of the highest order, like beauty, is truth; and Hardy's humour is of this kind—the humour which proceeds from understanding and sympathy. Again and again he has woven into the sombre texture of his tragedy exquisite, droll episodes beside which the comic relief in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth* appears unconscionably crude.

A recapitulation of the merits of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* would be incomplete without some mention of Hardy's style, which by the time this book was written had undoubtedly reached its full maturity. In the first place it is entirely free from the strained self-consciousness that marred much of the work of Dickens and Meredith.[2] Hardy's best manner (and his lapses are few) has all the directness, vigour, and austerity of his matter. It is sober and re-

[1] Macmillan's Pocket Edition, p. 144.

[2] See *The Early Life*, p. 138: 'The whole secret of a living style, and the difference between it and a dead style, lies in not having too much style—being, in fact, a little careless, or rather seeming to be, here and there. It brings wonderful life into the writing.' (Note-book.)

strained in colouring; yet it is sufficiently flexible for his purpose, and conveys with equal truth the poignant emotion of a tragic conflict and the inane chatter of village idiots. Both Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie and Mr. Duffin have remarked on the absence of poetical supersense—that 'dynamic' quality in the words, that aura of subtle suggestion to be found in the greatest prose styles. The criticism is a just one, and points to a deficiency which is to be noticed even in Hardy's poetry, authentic poetry as it is. But in his prose I should hesitate to call it a defect. His matter being what it was, I for one would never wish his style to have been a whit more De Quinceyan, Stevensonian, or Lambesque. No one can deny that he is a master of logical exposition, sustained rhythm, a judicious use of balance, and an unusual richness of figurative illustration. Whatever his style does not convey, it certainly does convey the naked beauty of his concept. Remembering the fable of the dog and the bone, one looks with suspicion on the reflection —that extraneous beauty which Hardy, had he been less sincere, might conceivably have striven to attain. A fair woman, said the magnificent Francis Thompson, looks her best in plain attire. And as this poet to his 'not impossible She', so many lovers of Hardy must have been moved to exclaim:

I cannot see your body for your soul.

II

As I have already suggested, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* will probably stand for all time as a great novel chiefly on account of one tremendous character—the protagonist, Michael Henchard. But before this claim can be substantiated, it may be necessary to examine with care certain strictures which in recent years have been directed against Hardy's method. Most critics are agreed about one point: that the plots of the major novels reveal a unique virtuosity, and what has been called an architectural symmetry of design. But whereas one party sees in this manipulation of characters and events a merely mechanical skill which is unworthy of great art and is barely justified by the resultant impression, the other more favourable party would go to any extreme to defend the method solely on account of that resultant impression, which to them is exquisite, and would define the novelist's invention not as arbitrary puppet-dangling, but as an enviable richness in 'apposite illustrative incident'—the power of being able to dramatize an intellectual discovery with superb effect. Impartial criticism must, at the outset, concede some truth to the former opinion. Half way

through *Far from the Madding Crowd* George Moore closed the book in disgust—a disgust due to what he considered a violation of the dictum *Ars est celare artem.*[1] Recently George Moore pronounced *ore rotundo* some wild judgements on Hardy and Conrad. Nevertheless, the calmer reflections to be found in his writings are always significant. That is why I have made his own dictum 'Art is logic' the touchstone whereby I hope to show that many of the strictures directed against Hardy have been carried too far, and have even revealed a lack of sensibility in the critic.

One critic has said that *The Mayor of Casterbridge* reads like a film scenario. He concedes, I think, a good scenario. Confessedly and ruthlessly judging Hardy by the standards of Henry James, he complains of an unpardonable want of 'psychology'; he is disgusted, too, by what he calls the author's inferior substitute for the Jamesian psychology—a 'piling up of stage tricks, a concatenation of circumstances violent and surprising, all obvious and striking arrangements for providing excitement.' Thus spake J. W. Beach in 1922;[2] and in 1930 we are quite familiar with the criticism which makes Henry James the criterion of all good fiction. To the student of literature, however, whose taste is not enslaved by the fashion of the hour, it is always unpleasant to see the peculiar excellence of one artist dragged into court in order to confute the entirely different excellence of another. It is a practice that is only too prevalent in criticism of the other arts—music, painting, and poetry. Passionate admirers of Stravinsky, Picasso, or T. S. Eliot justify their preference for the new prophets by heaping abuse upon the old. Hating anything in the nature of a dynasty, they scornfully denounce all earlier Schools as being mere ephemeral phases, insignificant steps in the evolution of their own particular rule—a complacency which is perhaps pardonable in the creative artist, but which is intolerable in the ordinary spectator and critic. And to return to our subject, this charge of melodramatic superficiality levelled against Hardy is obviously based upon the false assumption that Cerebral Comedy should dictate the requirements of Sophoclean Tragedy. And even if we admit that there may be some resemblance between the plot of *The Mayor* and a film scenario, does this amount to any more than saying that the plot is radically different from a Henry James plot, which does not resemble a scenario? Yes, you may reply; it amounts to saying that whereas in Henry James the connexion between character and thought and action is everywhere expounded with meticulous psychological precision, in Hardy (as in a scenario) this connexion is either

[1] *The Confessions of a Young Man.* [2] *The Technique of Thomas Hardy.*

ignored altogether or else treated in a perfunctory manner, so that action, being thus severed from its legitimate source in the brain, becomes in the hands of a quack a series of arbitrary dispensations directed towards an ignoble end, 'a concatenation of circumstances &c. . . . all obvious arrangements for providing excitement.' Against this I affirm that Hardy is guilty of no such gross charlatanism. *The Mayor* contains just as much psychology as an essentially dramatic exposition of character requires, and, I rejoice to say, no more. Since Hardy was not ordained to write *The Ambassadors*, we may be thankful that he was not doomed to the persuasion that the only estimable qualities in a novel are those hair-splitting subtleties and laboured intellectual obscenities which pass with many people to-day for psychology and the only satisfying form of wit. Nobody will deny that psychology is the life-blood of good fiction; but the danger lurks in plethora, in making Freudian speculation a morbid gymnastic and a wholly insufficient end in itself. Great art assumes a clear and exact delineation of some lofty concept; and in fiction the artist's method must deliberately simulate the inscrutable logic of what has been variously termed the First Cause, the Immanent Will, &c. Provided, therefore, that the creator of fictitious characters can make them speak and act in a convincing manner, and move, as by divine compulsion, towards a worthy emotional climax, the psychology is implicit, and the artistic aim is achieved. The one essential canon is that incident must everywhere be subservient to idea.[1] Shakespeare's plays are full of 'obvious and striking arrangements for providing excitement.' The lusty Elizabethans demanded it. But for some reason this master-dramatist is never quite himself in a modern film.[2] The reason may be that he gives us, besides crude melodrama, a good deal of genuine psychology. Not only psychology, but poetry, which likewise cannot be photographed. The same is true of Hardy. If *The Mayor* really does resemble a film scenario, I can only deplore the fact that so much literary genius is daily being sacrificed in the production of comparatively worthless films.

Another defect in *The Mayor* which stirs the same critic to vehement protest is the frequency of overheard conversations. It is

[1] Cf. with this Hardy's own words in *The Early Life*, Jan. 14th, 1887: 'A "sensation-novel" is possible in which the sensationalism is not casualty, but evolution; not physical but psychical. . . . The difference between the latter kind of novel and the novel of physical sensationalism—i.e., personal adventure, &c.—is this: that whereas in the physical the adventure itself is the subject of interest, the psychical results being passed over as commonplace, in the psychical the casualty or adventure is held to be of no intrinsic interest, but the effect upon the faculties is the important matter to be depicted.'

[2] In time the 'talking' film may alter this.

true that this artifice is a favourite one with Hardy, and inasmuch as the repetition is noticeable it must be considered a technical flaw. But even when this admission has been made, a careful scrutiny of the novel will reveal the fact that the flaw is not a serious one, since nowhere throughout the story does the development of plot or character depend entirely upon the facts gleaned from an overheard conversation. Usually the situation is brought about so naturally, is described with such truth and sensibility, and illustrates so effectively the underlying idea, that anything like a lengthy defence would be an impertinence. Of this kind is the pathetic colloquy overheard by Farfrae and Lucetta on the occasion of their first meeting in High Place Hall.[1] The pitiful outcry of the peasant girl who is about to lose her lover brings a tear to the eye of the emotional Lucetta; at the same time it inspires the phlegmatic Farfrae to assist the unhappy pair. The result of this episode is that a bond of attraction is formed between Lucetta and Farfrae. But it would be a mistake to suppose that subsequent weighty events are entirely due to this accidental eavesdropping. The incident is a piece of pure ornamentation, justified by its sheer beauty; and the attachment, which it precipitated, would certainly have developed into a marriage without it.

Our critic has also said that Henchard 'seems always to be so placed behind wall or haystack as to hear news that maddens him and drives him on to fatal action.' Here the facts are nearly correct but the inference is altogether false. It is true that on two occasions Hardy contrives to make Henchard overhear certain words which stick daggers into him by confirming his worst suspicions. One occasion is when he follows Lucetta and Farfrae into the moonlit cornfield, and from the interior of a wheat-stook catches a fragment of their amorous talk. The other occasion is when he overhears Farfrae making love to Elizabeth-Jane on the far side of a wall. But the important point is that this eavesdropping is not purely accidental. On both occasions Henchard is deliberately playing the spy.[2] His action is perfectly in character. Moreover, it is not, as might be supposed, entirely abject. It is the natural outcome of a train of circumstances, the culmination of a clearly defined process of thought and the expression of what is, after all, the best side of his character. Henchard is a man of many faults; but he has at least, deep down, an intense desire for a true and abiding affection. As he continues to sink in the social scale, this desire grows to a despotic passion. But since he is a man of moods and devoid of geniality and humour, he is difficult to live

[1] Macmillan's Pocket Edition, p. 192. [2] ibid., p. 370 (bottom).

with, and none knows it better than himself. Hence the *sollicitus timor* of his love. Lacking confidence in his power to attract and hold affection, he is an easy prey to jealous fears. He has the hypersensitiveness of a certain type of egoist, and once his suspicions are aroused, he anxiously lies in wait for conclusive evidence of desertion. People of this kind are only too common in everyday life. They anticipate the nemesis of their own failings. Literally or figuratively, they apply their ear to every keyhole; they seek the worst, and usually they find it. To return to Henchard, I affirm that in neither of these overheard conversations does he glean any sudden and unexpected information. Each time he had known quite well beforehand the exasperating course his affairs were taking. The device, therefore, is simply an effective and legitimate way of bringing his suffering to a head. It is another example of the essential condensed logic of Art as opposed to the apparent sprawling incoherency of Nature. A greater novelist might have given us a more naturalistic or indeed an entirely abstract 'psychological' exposition. Many readers, however, will continue to find Hardy's method admirable. It is dramatic, true to character, and has all the probability that fictive action need have.

A careful examination of the novel will show that in the evolution of Henchard there is at all times a strict connexion between act and consequence. The consequences, it is urged, are usually fatalistic; but so they are in the stories of Oedipus and Lear. The closer parallel, at the first glance, is that of Oedipus, about whom the casual critic might exclaim, as I have heard him exclaim about Henchard: 'How depressing! The poor wretch doesn't stand a chance!' But for the reader who has been 'convinced' by Henchard, as he is convinced by Hamlet, Lear, and Macbeth, the vital question still remains to be answered: How far was Henchard master of his own fate? Certainly, we may say at once, to a far greater extent than Oedipus, who was doomed by stern gods to be a martyr for the enlightenment of the whole human race. For whereas Oedipus kills his own father and weds his own mother by oracular decree and without knowing what he is doing, Henchard, on the contrary, sells his wife, bullies Abel Whittle, estranges Farfrae, persecutes Elizabeth-Jane, dallies with Lucetta, speculates wildly, deceives Newson, and all the time is as fully aware of the tenor of his actions as were Hamlet, Lear, and Macbeth of theirs. Fundamentally good, he soon feels the prick of conscience and strives to make amends; but Something, which is at once an objective and a subjective antagonism, is forever thwarting his best intentions. He

accepts this scourging as the just punishment for his own misdeeds, and at each successive stroke of the whip he clenches his teeth and murmurs, in a spirit of heroic resignation: 'My punishment is not more than I can bear.'

All this testifies to Hardy's appreciation of the truth in those words quoted from Novalis: 'Character is Fate'.[1] We see in Hardy, as we see also in Shakespeare, that the warp of calamity which is spun out of the tragic character is caught up, as it were, by the weft of a malign external Fate, and woven into that dire net from which there is no escape save by the way of death. In *The Mayor* we see this process at work on those frequent occasions when Henchard's most auspicious plans or most innocent desires are narrowly forestalled by some adverse circumstance which turns them all to dust and ashes. We see it in the disastrous rainstorms, to produce which Fate seems to have conspired at one time with Henchard's want of foresight, at another time with his ignorant credulity and superstition. We see it in his discovery that Elizabeth-Jane is not his own daughter—the discovery preceding by only a few hours the long-desired moment when she consents to call him ' father'. We see it in the way Farfrae captures Lucetta's fancy only a few minutes before Henchard makes his belated first appearance at High Place Hall. We see it again in the return of the furmity-woman, in the return of Newson. Surely (you may say), a dismal and preposterous fugue of ironic happenings, in which Henchard must appear to some readers insupportably futile and to others insupportably wretched. The truth is, however, that these facts will appeal quite differently to those readers whose emotions react fully to all the subtle contrapuntal harmonies which the poet plays upon this massive organ-like character. It is perhaps a tenable theory that the book is bound to appeal rightly and powerfully only to people of a certain pathological type—a type which is most common in the South of this island, and in which sympathy, sensibility, and casuistry predominate over practical, hard-headed acquisitiveness. That, at least, is what I have found among my own acquaintance; for the latter qualities frequently co-exist in that large class of readers who 'seek only their own ideas in a representation, and prize that which should be as higher than what is.'[2] But those who are prone to seek in a novel that interpretation of truth for which the facts were expressly evolved

[1] Macmillan's Pocket Edition, p. 136 (bottom): 'But most probably *luck had little to do with it. Character is Fate*, said Novalis. . . .' This statement is intensely significant in the light of later findings in this essay.

[2] Quoted by Hardy in the preface to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

will probably disagree with those cavillers who say that in *The Mayor* the too frequent use of coincidence and irony is a serious artistic blemish.

Mr. H. C. Duffin has called the novel 'A Study in the Irony of Fate'. The description is true up to a point; but it seems to me that to call this 'Story of a Man of Character' simply and plainly a 'Study in the Irony of Fate' is to attach a greater importance to 'irony' than to 'character'—a provision which detracts from Henchard's significance as a tragic figure, and which relegates Hardy's art to a lower plane than it deserves. I suggest that Mr. Duffin is so exclusively preoccupied with the Irony of Fate that he cannot see the 'Fate' (which is Character) for the 'Irony'—a fault of perception for which the novelist is not responsible.

In his remarks on the above quotation from Novalis, Mr. Duffin says in the first place that 'character is simply one of the circumstances in a man's environment, but it is of a special and unique nature, inasmuch as it automatically modifies all the other circumstances, affects and changes them in a manner peculiar to itself. . . . It is in this sense that "Character is Fate". . . . It alone does not determine destiny, but it profoundly modifies all the other determining factors.' So far—well. But a little later, after having recorded Henchard's rise to the mayoralty, the critic says: 'Henchard's character, reacting upon certain of his circumstances, has already[1] brought about several facts which are now part of his destiny, *and which are to ensure his fall from power*.' These facts are, of course, the sale of his wife to Newson, her subsequent return with Elizabeth-Jane, and the final appearance of Newson himself. Now the words that I have put in italics are perfectly true: the 'ironical' facts do ensure or *complete* Henchard's downfall. But if the words were intended to mean that Henchard's fall was due to what may be called the wife-selling *motif*, and to no other, then those words are grossly misleading. Mr. Duffin does not make this point clear. He does not show that Henchard's fall was due much more directly to the rivalry of Farfrae, to the crumbling of his own powers of resistance, to the gradual ripening of fatal inherent weaknesses. The tragic conflict is the struggle between Henchard and Farfrae, and the fall of the protagonist is the story of his slow defeat by a stronger man than himself—a man, moreover, whose advent was in no wise connected with the wife-selling *motif*. The main crisis in Henchard's career occurs in the scene where Farfrae rebukes his master for his rash cruelty towards Abel Whittle, whose flesh he would mortify for unpunctuality. As Moulton found so frequently in Shake-

[1] Nineteen years before, at Weydon Priors.

speare's tragedies, the few significant words that mark this crisis have the air of deliberate artifice:

'Hullo, hullo!' said Henchard, coming up behind. 'Who's sending him [Whittle] back?'

All the men looked towards Farfrae.

'I am', said Donald. 'I say this joke has been carried far enough!'[1]

The words in italics clearly foreshadow the change of allegiance which from that day onwards proceeds steadily to its bitter and inevitable end.

But it will be noticed that although Farfrae's opposition is not a direct result of that earlier crisis, the wife-selling, yet it was brought about by precisely the same weakness in Henchard's character—his passionate impulsiveness. Observe, too, the striking consistency in the immediate results. After the wife-selling he repents, swears a great oath to abstain from drink for twenty years, and sets out at once to make amends. After the rebuke from Farfrae he quickly admits his error in these words:

'Why did you speak to me before the men like that, Farfrae? You might have stopped till we were alone.'

Then his next words hint at a real and significant connexion between his earlier misdeed and his present one:

'Ah—I know why. I've told ye the secret of my life [the wife-selling]—fool that I was to do't—and you take advantage of me.'

To which Farfrae replies, with frank sincerity:

'I had forgot it.'[2]

That is the simplicity of great art. The novelist supplies the vital facts without undue comment, and so sure are his observation and judgement that the psychological truth of the situation is at once 'felt' by the reader. He will realize, too, that when Farfrae says that his opposition was not provoked by his knowledge of Henchard's guilty secret, he is speaking the truth—as far as he knows it. The whole truth is, however, that his knowledge of the earlier indiscretion would subconsciously quicken his perception of later ones.

It is along these lines that Henchard's character 'automatically modifies' that element in his environment which is Donald Farfrae. As soon as he appeared on the scene, Farfrae was a 'determining factor' in Henchard's destiny; but it was the specific character of the latter, 'profoundly modifying' that 'determining factor', which eventually converted a faithful servant into a formidable, if involuntary, rival. It cannot be too forcibly stated, in defence of Hardy's art, that it is Henchard himself, and not Fate, who ulti-

[1] Macmillan's Pocket Edition, p. 119. [2] ibid., p. 119.

mately makes Farfrae what he is; similarly it is in himself, no less than in his stars, that Henchard must seek the causes of his own failure. Wherefore it seems to me that to call this novel, as Mr. Duffin does, a mere 'record of disappointment', a study of ' a single mortal writhing on the toasting-fork of Fate' is to show very little more subtlety or discernment than those worthies who named their play 'the lamentable comedy of Pyramus and Thisby'. It is false to declare that Henchard is merely a pathetic figure, a gambler who is always losing; he is a man of parts, sensibility, and honour who, in his most enlightened moments, recognizes his own insidious weaknesses and is perpetually fighting them: 'Why should I be subject to these visitations of the devil when I try so hard to keep them away?'[1] It is a losing battle; but like the struggles of Macbeth and Hamlet, it reaches the sublime. In short, the fate of Henchard is tragic in the truest sense of that much-abused word. He may be sport for the President of the Immortals, but the most disastrous effects of this sport can all be traced to their prime causes in his character. The death of his own daughter, the return and duplicity of his wife, the return of the furmity-woman and Newson—all these are perfectly feasible results of the wife-selling. Henchard's bankruptcy is due not to the wet harvest but to his superstition, set in motion by a malicious desire to ruin Farfrae with all possible speed. His loss of prestige in the eyes of the townsfolk was largely due to his petulant egoistic self-depreciation—a morbid state of mind occasioned by acute jealousy: 'Go to Mr. Farfrae. He's master here now.'[2] Farfrae is able to capture the heart of Lucetta only a few minutes before Henchard's arrival simply because Henchard himself, out of pure pique and wounded vanity, is deliberately three days late. Examples could be multiplied, and in all these semi-fatalistic happenings we discern a rough poetic justice similar to that found in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*.

It has been said, in no complimentary way, that the old furmity-woman 'is made to reappear just at the time when she is required to complete the degradation of Henchard'.[3] This statement is true in the superficial sense that the old woman's public disclosures put an end to his career as a man of importance in Casterbridge; but it is false in the deeper sense that it leaves out of account the main tragic issue, the inner struggle between the good and bad elements in his nature. In this latter respect the word 'degradation' must be replaced by its own antonym.[4] And consider the artifice implied in the word 'made'. Was it not by a similar dispensation that

[1] See p. 27 of this essay.
[2] Macmillan's Pocket Edition, p. 119.
[3] J. W. Beach (1922).
[4] See Macmillan, p. 242: 'No—'t is true', &c.

Laertes and Fortinbras were 'made' successively to fill the stage with their bombast and heroics just at the time when they were needed to set off or 'complete' the degradation of Hamlet?—that in *King Lear* Gloucester, actuated by the best motives, interrupts the king's sleep just at the time when sleep would have knit up the ravelled sleave of his care?—and again that Edgar, masquerading as Tom o' Bedlam, unwittingly reminds the old man of his direst wrongs just at the time when such a reminder was fatal to his mental balance? If Hardy is to be judged by accepted standards, in the name of truth let them be universal! I suspect that Hardy understood the difference between Nature and Art better than some critics do. The writer of fiction, as Sheridan observed long ago, is not obliged to give us what does happen in everyday life; he may give us, if he choose, only what might happen. In effect, he gives us just whatever he wants to happen, and most of us are prepared to accept it so long as it is true to his chosen convention, true to his progressive idea, intellectually stimulating—in a word, convincing. So far from leaving me unconvinced, or even dubious, the return of the furmity-woman seemed to me almost inevitable. I expected it, almost as when, in the reading of poetry, my ear expects a rhyme. And even if I had at first been doubtful of its artistic integrity, the stark effectiveness of the court scene, with the light it throws on the better side of Henchard's character, and the Rabelaisian humour in the altercation between the harridan and the local Dogberry, would have reconciled me to a great deal of crude construction. But after all, was this return so improbable? Hardy frequently insists on the compact nature of Wessex, and the story of such an unusual transaction as the sale of a wife was bound to become a tradition which was likely to pop up anywhere within the limits of this little world. Moreover, the time when a prominent man is suffering under a serious reverse of fortune is notoriously the time when he finds it most difficult to conceal the delinquencies of his past. Granted, then, a fair possibility that the story in question would eventually reach Casterbridge, who so likely to carry it, who so likely to disgorge it from the dock of a county court, as this old cynical peripatetic, the furmity-woman?

I have said that the reappearance of this woman seemed to me almost inevitable; and behind that statement lies an important truth about Hardy's method. I have maintained in this essay that he is unusually fertile in 'apposite illustrative incident', the only true criterion of which is the way it is made to interpret spiritual values, and to demonstrate ultimately the force of the dictum 'Character is Fate'. When the reader's conception of a

character is clear and strong, his imagination is stirred by a prophetic impulse which roughly simulates the creative impulse of the author. So powerful is this secondary impression of dynamic reality, that the reader's mind begins to grope forward vaguely and tentatively in the tracks of the creator, and by the same inductive process foreshadows a destiny. Then, as he reads on, and incident after incident is unfolded, he seems to be already half familiar with them; they coincide broadly with his preconceived notions, and he accepts them readily as authentic revelations. As Coleridge once said, the interest of the reader is maintained by expectation and not by surprise. And a modern novelist[1] has said the same in other words: 'In some of the most tedious novels ever written you can't tell what is going to happen next—and you don't care a fig what is going to happen next. It would be nearer the mark to say that the plot is good when you want to make sure what will happen next. Good plots set you anxiously guessing what will happen next.' In Shakespeare's tragedies this prevision by the spectator is often stimulated by ironic utterances of the characters themselves. King Lear foreshadows his own madness; Romeo foreshadows his own untimely doom. Similarly Henchard, in seeking to persuade Farfrae to enter his service, makes the fatalistic statement: 'In my business, 'tis true, strength and bustle build up a firm. But judgement and knowledge are what keep it established.'[2] Now by this time the reader has already inferred, from Henchard's past actions, that he is deficient in these two qualities—judgement and knowledge: hence a decline in his fortunes is expected, guessed at, anxiously awaited.

III

Having attempted to clear away some of the misunderstandings which hitherto may have prevented a just appreciation, we shall now consider in greater detail the character of the protagonist. Michael Henchard, like the great figures in Shakespearian tragedy, is built on the grand scale. He stands six foot one and a half in his socks, has a stentorian voice, and eyes that 'dig into men's souls'. He is a man in whom the primitive passions are strong. When he is agitated he moves 'like a great tree in a storm'. At first we see him as an egoist who is striving to realize all the forces within him; and with the callousness of egoism he is harsh towards those who hinder his progress. By dint of extraordinary energy and 'sledge-hammer directness' he achieves material success; but his composite nature is infectedwith the germs of decay. In a palaeolithic society

[1] Mr. Arnold Bennett. [2] Macmillan's Pocket Edition, p. 57.

his positive qualities would have been sufficient to secure his ascendancy; but amid the sophistication and complexity of modern life, where Christian charity and sentiment, Machiavellian policy, and Nietschean injustice are inextricably woven into the fabric of conventional morality, his virtues are in many respects his fatal weaknesses. Lacking the education and knowledge necessary in a competitive world for the preservation of his gains, he lacks also the shrewdness and tact of the man who, while delegating to others the tasks which he himself cannot perform, cautiously conceals his deficiency, and always contrives to keep the reins of control in his own hands. 'In diplomacy he was as wrong-headed as a buffalo', and when challenged by Farfrae he scorns compromise and foolishly opposes 'his clumsy cudgel to the skilful dirk of a wiser man than himself'. His superstition, which steps in to complete the ruin begun by his headstrong methods, is again a survival from the palaeolithic age, which rendered him unfit for the more cunningly contested battles of an age of science. He has the egoist's reserve; but when a man takes his fancy, he 'takes it strong'. To such a one he is warm and confiding. Here again his virtue proved to be his fatal weakness; for in the deep and sincere affection which he lavished upon Farfrae (and which actually drew from the unresponsive young man a rather priggish reproach) we see the germ of Henchard's failure to maintain his ascendancy. He is sensitive about his personal honour—a primitive virtue which, when 'spoilt', merges into the modern vice of vanity. So with Henchard; for the fashionable snobbery of the modern bourgeoisie has smutched him, and he so far belies his real self as to bully his step-daughter for the simple freedom of her manners and for her innocent use of dialect words. Indeed, it is the juxtaposition of intensely human foibles and large heroic qualities which makes this character so convincingly 'round' and complete. He is a man of strong prejudices, hasty, passionate, sometimes even cruel through sheer lack of imagination: a man who is unable to strike the happy mean in thought, feeling, or action. Yet beneath all this fiery truculence, there is practical generosity, courage, and a real sense of justice. Moreover, his long suffering brings to light a fortitude, a deep humility, and a loving-kindness which deserved a better fate.

Mr. Duffin has said that Henchard, with all his faults, does not offend us. That is what comes of calling the story a 'record of disappointment'. Most appreciative readers will disagree with the critic. They will surely find that throughout the greater part of the tale their feelings will alternate between violent disgust and genuine sympathy; that about the middle sympathy will be at very

low ebb; and that towards the end it will rapidly increase and finally overwhelm every scruple. In all literature I doubt if there is to be found anything more moving than Henchard's last *cris de cœur*. One has been cited already.[1] Another is to be found at the end of Chapter XLI. After he has been saved from suicide, and Elizabeth-Jane has taken pity on him and promised to return to him, she overhears these words: 'Who is such a reprobate as I! And yet it seems that even I be in Somebody's hand!' Some time later, before he quits her for good, he tells her that he does not wish to stay and see her married to Farfrae, and adds: 'Don't let my sins, when you know them all, cause 'ee quite to forget that though I loved 'ee late I loved 'ee well.'[2] At the height of his anguish he is a stoic. An object of pity, he never pities himself. When he is rejected as a cheat by this woman whom he now loves better than life, there are, as the reader knows, extenuating circumstances; but when his lips are half parted to begin an explanation, he shuts them up like a vice. All the tragic significance of this man's failure to cope with life is concentrated in two words: 'He rose to his feet and stood like a *dark ruin*.'[3]

It was a fine inspiration which made the 'poor fond fool' Abel Whittle follow his former master to his lonely death. In Whittle's last simple account[4] of that grim surrender there is exquisite tenderness—a single touch of spontaneous human sympathy, a hint of redemption, which relieves, while it accentuates, the final agony. And it is the sublimity of this death-scene which, to my mind, utterly refutes the charge of pessimism so frequently brought against Hardy. For surely, when a writer can make us feel so intensely the poignant throes of a dying soul (and that is what Henchard desires—complete annihilation) he is *ipso facto* proving to us the great value he sets on the human soul; and only by a considerable elasticity of definition can such a valuation be called pessimistic. It is true that here, as in Shakespeare, there is no hint of survival in the paradisean or, indeed, any other sense. And Shakespeare has never been called a pessimist. Then why Hardy? Posterity will probably find it expedient to reserve the appellation for the creator of the Yahoos.

IV

Charles Lamb said that the tragedy of King Lear was too intense for stage representation, because as we read the play 'we *are* Lear'. That is exactly how many of us will feel about Henchard: we *are* Henchard. And with that surmise I am tempted to follow up a

[1] See p. 23 of this essay, note 1.
[2] Macmillan's Pocket Edition, p. 378.
[3] ibid., p. 395.
[4] ibid., p. 403.

larger comparison, which I have always felt to be justified, between Lear and Henchard. To commence paradoxically with a difference, it is certainly true that, so far as human agents are concerned, Henchard is a man more sinning than sinned against: in his case, indeed, a more active and malign external Fate is to be reckoned with. But when that point is conceded, we find many striking resemblances both in character and destiny. Each story opens with an act of folly springing from one fundamental weakness, egoism. Lear casts off his favourite daughter because she refuses to pander to his vanity. Henchard casts off the responsibility of wife and child because they are a serious hindrance to his self-development. The natural passion in Lear is aggravated by senility; the natural passion in Henchard is aggravated by alcohol. Actually Henchard is *twice* guilty of casting off a woman to whom he was bound, and the closer parallel to Cordelia is, of course, the girl Elizabeth-Jane. There follows for both men a long story of retribution, of purgation through suffering. The decline of the old king begins at once, whereas the fall of the corn-factor begins soon after he has achieved a worldly prosperity which in Casterbridge roughly corresponds to the regal *ne plus ultra*. Both are divested of wealth and authority. Both are the victims of a too generous delegation of power to inferiors. Both feel a bitter regret for their lost position. Both are spurned from their own threshold by the upstart usurpers who have entered into possession. They are both so keenly affected by their misfortunes that their minds are unhinged. Lear becomes completely insane; Henchard, a much younger man, takes to drink and becomes decidedly crazed, as witness his fierce attack on Farfrae and his mad freak at the royal visit. Henchard, when all pride of office has gone, tries to recover his self-respect by forcibly demonstrating to his successful rival that he (Henchard) is still the better man in one sense—the physical. 'I could double him up like that', he says, laying a poker across his knee and bending it as if it were a twig, 'and yet I don't.'[1] Lear, moved by the same proud despair, boasts of his physical prowess in youth:

> I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion
> I would have made them skip.

Even Lear's terrible execrations on his daughters find their counterpart in the novel, for Henchard, in the bitterness of hatred, forces the trembling choir, in 'The Three Mariners', to consign Farfrae to perdition with ritualistic thoroughness:[2]

> And the next age his hated name
> Shall utterly deface.

[1] Macmillan's Pocket Edition, p. 282.

[2] ibid., p. 281.

Eventually both men are purged of their egoism, of their vanity, and of their harshness towards inferiors. Each becomes as a little child, living only for the sake of the daughter he has wronged. The ultimate ideal of each is fully expressed in those poignant words of the king:

> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage.

Their dream is frustrated, and the catastrophe that overwhelms the one and the other seems to be the only consummation possible.

These resemblances between two great stories may not signify much; but they are interesting, since they provide another illustration of what has been called 'the tide of Time' in literature. It is certain that Hardy had been profoundly impressed by *King Lear*; and although any suggestion of borrowing or imitation would be impertinent, it is not unnatural to suppose that when two great writers have perceived similar aspects of universal truth their accents should sometimes coincide. I do not suggest that they are equal. For grandeur of conception, richness of incidental poetry, dramatic power, and vastness of cataclysmic issues, *King Lear* must stand as a greater work than *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. But the latter, as a domestic drama woven out of the stuff of our everyday lives, is perhaps nearer to our sympathies. The tragedy of Michael Henchard is the supreme consummation of the tragedy of all those who

> . . . in Life's busy scenes immersed
> See better things and do the worst.[1]

[1] Matthew Green.

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CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

By

DOROTHY MARGARET STUART

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CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

ON 5 December 1830—exactly one hundred years ago to-day—a daughter was born to Gabriele and Frances Rossetti in their rather shabby and meagre London house, 38 Charlotte Street, Portland Place. They had already three children, an elder daughter, Maria Francesca, and two sons, Dante Gabriel and William Michael. The arrival of a fourth child must have raised more than one practical problem, and with such problems Mrs. Rossetti had to grapple almost unaided, while her husband spent most of his scanty leisure trying to unravel the cryptogram which he believed to underlie the *Divina Commedia*.

In the incredibly ugly church of All Souls', Langham Place, then fresh from the builders' hands, their youngest child was baptized Christina Georgina, and under the shadow of its candle-extinguisher tower she spent the first two decades of her uneventful life. Few poets have owed less to their early environment than Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his little sister; few have had a stronger hereditary tendency towards the writing of verse. Through their mother they were descended from a Tuscan family of Greek origin, whose forebears may have been among those Hellenic settlers that brought to the banks of the Arno the cult of the Black Demeter of Phigalia; on their father's side they derived from sturdy Calabrian peasant stock; but on *both* sides the instinct to 'drop into poetry' had been constantly recurrent during the eighteenth century. Gabriele Rossetti himself had been, in his youth, official librettist to the San Carlo opera house at Naples; when his younger daughter was born, he held a post as tutor at King's College, London, and there he remained until failing health compelled him to resign.

Christina Rossetti was eighteen when this turning-point in the family fortunes came, and it seemed as if she would be thrust all too early into the hereditary calling of resident governess—a calling which had been exercised by her English grandmother, Mrs. Polidori, by her own mother, and by her Polidori aunts, a calling which her sister Maria Francesca had already taken up in order to ease the financial situation at home. It is greatly to the credit of the Rossettis that they never allowed this most spiritually gifted and physically fragile among them to face the grind of a governess's life. Under ideal conditions, such as those which Charlotte Polidori had found at Longleat, it meant self-obliteration; under less than ideal conditions it meant some such sequence of dull tasks

and petty humiliations as Charlotte Brontë had to endure—to her lasting detriment.

Old Mr. Polidori had said concerning his youngest grandchild *avrai più spirito di tutti*, and before she was eighteen he printed, on his own private printing-press, a collection of her verses. If it was upon these Juvenilia that her kinsfolk based their belief in Christina's genius, it can only be said that they showed remarkable acumen, for, though there are certain affinities between her mature work and her immature, the rather languid and maudlin tone of the earliest poems gives little indication of the power which came with years, and only too much of the weakness which never wholly departed from her.

The events of Christina Rossetti's life were so sparse, and her range of action and experience was so narrow, that it might be possible to understand and to enjoy her poetry without any knowledge of any of her emotional adventures but two. These two were, of course, her acceptance of James Collinson's proposal of marriage in 1849 and her refusal of Charles Bagot Cayley's in or about 1866. Between these two dates she wrote much of her best poetry, including *When I am dead, my Dearest*, *Sleep at Sea*, *Remember Me when I am gone away*, *The Convent Threshold*, *Goblin Market*, and *Up-Hill*, and it was after Collinson had begun to fade out, and before Cayley had begun to fade in, that her first volume, *Goblin Market and other Poems*, was published. In the interval the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had dissolved, *The Germ* had run its brief and disregarded course, and the Pre-Raphaelite movement had begun, stubbornly and almost mysteriously, to make its influence felt. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' It was by the death of *The Germ* that the seed it bore achieved life. There was never a fraternity whose early failures seemed so hopeless as did the early failures of the P.R.B. That group of five earnest, excited, clever, and—with one exception—very imperfectly educated young men looked an unlikely band to thrust a great literary and artistic movement upon an uninterested age and country. But on the edge of the group stood the slight, pensive, crinolined figure of her who, as Swinburne said, 'led their host to victory'.

Though Gosse called Christina Rossetti the High Priestess of Pre-Raphaelitism, and though she sympathized with the activities and—up to a certain point—shared the views and endorsed the principles of her brother and his friends, her essential aloofness was broken by these things hardly at all. It was not only that a certain streak of Puritanical austerity kept her apart from the full-blooded

Bohemianism of Dante Gabriel and 'his little Northumbrian friend', Algernon Charles Swinburne, or that an old-fashioned reticence and decorum made her unresponsive to the rather 'robustious, periwig-pated' idealism of William Morris. She was not temperamentally fitted to take part in any strenuous movement, aesthetic, intellectual, or even moral; for if one of the Seven Deadly Sins found harbourage in the soul of this mid-Victorian Virgin Saint it was *Accidia*. The word is usually mistranslated 'Sloth', but the thing is, as Professor Saintsbury has said, 'a form, or at least a corruption, of Melancholy'. *Accidia*, as Chaucer's Parson knew, leads to a sort of mournful apathy, called by him 'sloggy slombrynge', to distrust of self, and to distrust of God. The man whom it infects 'is lyk to hym that falleth in the dich and wol nat arise'. Consciously sometimes, more often unconsciously, Christina resisted this tendency; but when her resistance gave way she would betray the surrender in some such line as 'This life is full of numbness and of balk', or some such *cri de cœur* as,

> What would I give for a heart of flesh to warm me through,
> Instead of this heart of stone, ice-cold whatever I do!
> Hard and cold and small, of all hearts the worst of all.

At such moments she was like De Quincey's Lady of Sighs. 'Our Lady of Sighs never clamours, never defies, dreams not of rebellious aspirations. She is humble to abjectness. Hers is the meekness that belongs to the hopeless.' And because such moments were not infrequent with her she was unable to march steadily in step with any eager company, to the rhythm of any common marching song. She was born a solitary; and had she been born in Egypt three centuries after the Crucifixion she would have spent most of her life in a cave, practising austerities and contemplating the emblems of mortality. It is very necessary in her case to distinguish between melancholy and morbidity, which are not synonyms, though people often talk loosely as though they were. She was a melancholy woman all her days, but 'let us', as Mr. Desmond McCarthy recently exclaimed, 'let us hear no more about the morbidity of Christina Rossetti!'

The narrow and monochrome environment in which her early years were spent, both in London and during her brief exile at Frome, may have emphasized if it did not positively create, the melancholic bent in Christina Rossetti. Her first love affair, which coincided with the formation of the P.R.B. and lasted almost exactly as long as the Brotherhood lasted, was a shabby-genteel sort of episode, and brought neither colour nor music into her life.

James Collinson who seems, to speak metaphysically, the Pure Idea of a nonentity, was not alone unworthy of being loved by Christina; he was unworthy even to love her. Only her extreme youth—she was seventeen when they first met—and her schoolgirlish craving after romance can explain her acceptance of his suit. It is true that she wrote two of her most famous poems during the time of their betrothal, the sonnet *Remember Me* and the song, *When I am dead, my Dearest*; but it is not certain even now that either was directly inspired by Collinson. In the case of the sonnet it appears as if he *must* be the person addressed. To whom else can we fit the lines

> Remember me when no more day by day
> You tell me of our future that you planned—?

Yet in the case of the song there is no internal evidence; and we are free to imagine—perhaps even to hope—that if the 'Dearest' there apostrophized was a real person at all, he was *not* Mr. James Collinson, who lived in lodgings in Somers Town, and painted innocuous little pictures, and had a trick of lapsing into slumber at the most unexpected moments. Collinson certainly had not the power to set her deepest heartstrings quivering as Cayley could in after years. In the poems she wrote to her second lover, or about him, there is no such languishing, languid note as the note of *Looking Forward*, which was written at the height of the Collinson period and of which the second stanza runs:

> Pluck me no rose that groweth on a thorn,
> Nor myrtle white and cold as snow in June,
> Fit for a virgin on her marriage morn;
> But bring me poppies brimmed with sleepy death,
> And ivy choking what it garlandeth,
> And primroses that open to the moon.

It seems inconceivable that when Collinson's youthful fiancée spoke after this fashion she was absolutely sure of herself—or of *him*. Yet the little man's utter inadequacy is no valid argument against his usefulness as an instigator of poetry. In the genesis of a love-song few elements count for less than the personality of the beloved. Was not the Lucasta of Lovelace a shallow-hearted flirt and did not Keats write his last sonnet with the image of Fanny Brawne before his failing eyes?

It took Christina Rossetti the best part of a decade to recover from this experience, with its disillusionments and its frustrations, and its epilogue of vain regrets. If it were not for the evidence of her very early poems, the work of the pre-Collinson period, one

might surmise that here was the source of her constant reversions to the idea of a broken betrothal. There is in her narrative poems and in her ballads no theme which recurs so frequently. It underlies some of the finest, such as *The Prince's Progress*, *The Convent Threshold*, *A Bird's Eye View*, *The Hour and the Ghost*, *An Apple Gathering*, *A Peal of Bells*, *Sister Maude*, and some of the weakest, such as *Maude Clare*, *Cousin Kate*, and *Margery*. The cause of the tragedy is not always the same; now it will be the death of the lover, now the death of the beloved; here it will be the perfidy of one or the other, there some undefined and devastating stroke of fate; but always the fundamental idea is the idea of hopes withered, dreams belied, love thwarted, or love betrayed. The Cayley episode, though it left clear marks upon her later autobiographical poems, does not appear to have coloured any work of hers in which creative imagination supplies the motive-power: and nothing can be more certain than that she did not draw upon her personal experience when she wrote that curious group of poems beginning with *Eva* and *Divine and Human Pleading* in the Polidori book and including *Sœur Louise de la Miséricorde*, *The Three Nuns*, *Light Love*, *Jessie Cameron*, *Amor Mundi*, and *Cannot Sweeten*. These poems present an intriguing study in mid-Victorian feminine psychology, and deserve the attention of the critics who are now setting themselves to demonstrate that our grand-aunts were neither so seraphically 'unaware' nor so rigidly prim as we have long been led to suppose.

Goblin Market, the poem from which Christina Rossetti's first book takes its name, was written ten years after James Collinson had, by his return to the Roman fold, caused her to revoke her troth. There is certainly nothing in it suggestive of the 'mournful bird whose song is tired at last', nothing morbid, nothing sombre, though a good deal that is enigmatic. She herself called it a fairy-tale, and serious-minded people call it an allegory. It partakes of the character of both and at the same time goes beyond either. For a fairy-tale it has too much ornament in proportion to the action; for an allegory it is too unobvious, too undidactic. It is clear that the goblins, who ask for a curl from Laura's golden head in exchange for their

> . . . fruit globes fair or red,
> Sweeter than honey from the rock,

are really asking something much more, and that having sold, or, at least, pledged her soul, poor Laura will repent of the bargain and loathe what she had lately loved. The belief that the possessor of a lock of hair can exert magical powers over its original owner

is, probably, one of the most ancient and far-disseminated in the world; it pervades the folk-lore of primitive peoples, peeps out in many mythologies, and was used with quite excellent effect by 'Ingoldsby' Barham in his *Singular Passage in the Life of the late Henry Harris, D.D.*, which Christina may have read. This belief belongs to the same order as the belief that any injury done to the image of an individual is simultaneously inflicted upon his living body—an idea exploited by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in what he himself described as 'a ghastly ballad called *Sister Helen*'. Christina took, therefore, as the basis of her poem a very simple concept, pregnant with sinister and dramatic possibilities. But what does she do with it? She eliminates the sinister and substitutes the grotesque. Of drama she will have none. For the thrust and clash of cumulative incident she substitutes pure poetry. Even the repentance of Laura and her redemption through the fortitude of Lizzie are subordinated to this element. It is this recurring outrush of prismatic verse which obliterates the main outlines of character, makes the action seem vague and perfunctory, gives to every patch of dialogue the form and moving of a self-contained lyric. For this reason *Goblin Market* must stand as something a little less than an allegory, a little more than a fairy-tale. If we compare it with *The Prince's Progress*, where the fabulizing intention becomes apparent in the first line and remains visible to the last, where the action is energetic, the dialogue terse and broken, and the characters possess the attributes of recognizable beings, if not in three dimensions at least in two, we shall see to what a widely different order of poetic creation *Goblin Market* belongs, and how in proportion as it fails as an allegory it triumphs as a poem.

It may seem a bold proposition that the dialogue in *Goblin Market* resembles a sequence of short, self-contained lyrics rather than the exchange—however artificially constricted by the limits of rhyme and metre—of spontaneous speech. Yet how well-founded this proposition is will be clear from even a cursory glance at the passages in question. Take, for example, not the long-drawn-out chants of the goblins vaunting their wares, but Laura's answer to their reiterated, 'Come buy, come buy!'

> Good folk, I have no coin;
> To take were to purloin:
> I have no copper in my purse,
> I have no silver either,
> And all my gold is on the furze
> That shakes in windy weather
> Above the rusty heather.

Or, again, Lizzie's exhortation to Laura to hasten away from the haunted brook:

> Come with me home.
> The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,
> Each glowworm winks her spark,
> Let us get home before the night grows dark:
> For clouds may gather
> Though this is summer weather,
> Put out the lights and drench us through;
> Then if we lost our way what should we do?

Christina never lapsed again into such divine lawlessness. Perhaps she drew nearest to it in *Mirrors of Life and Death*, but there the affinity is in form, not in colour or mood. The passing of years, the burden of ill-health, the stranglehold of renunciation about her heart, all these combined slowly to crush the colour out of her verse. In the event, her poetic stature was nothing diminished, for her finest utterances are those which depend least upon extraneous adornments.

Apart from the poems in the short-lived *Germ*, Christina Rossetti's first emergence was made in *Macmillan's Magazine* during the year 1861, when *Up-Hill*, *A Birthday*, and *An Apple Gathering* appeared. Her brother William Michael tells us that *Up-Hill* was 'at once accepted by poetical readers as an observable thing', and we shall understand the pleasure felt by such readers if we pause to consider the state of lyrical poetry in England at the beginning of 1861. Thomas Lovell Beddoes had been dead for eleven years; Walter Savage Landor had ceased to sing; Mrs. Browning, so near the end of her span, had turned from romance and from romantic love to Italian politics as a source of inspiration; some of Robert Browning's finest shorter poems had already seen the light, but they had not, as yet, won their way into more than a limited circle of admirers; Tennyson was in the middle of that blank verse patch which separated his earlier from his later lyrical period, immersed in his Arthurian epics and moving towards *Enoch Arden* and *Aylmer's Field*. Among the Pre-Raphaelites and their friends Swinburne had so far published nothing, Dante Gabriel was still working upon the manuscript of his *Early Italian Poets*, George Meredith had not yet puzzled and challenged the critics with *Modern Love*. Only William Morris had entered the lists with his *Defence of Guenevere*, which three years earlier had struck a new note of robust and resonant medievalism.

What was curiously lacking in English lyrical poetry of the early

'sixties was that peculiarly English quality of *quietness* seldom absent from our literature for long, even during epochs as strenuous as the Elizabethan or as artificial as the Augustan. This quality made its appearance very early; we find it in that matchless carol *I sing of a Mayden*, in Wyatt's *Be still, my lute*, in many of Sidney's sonnets, notably *Leave me, O love, that reachest but to dust*, in Raleigh's *Give me my scallop-shell of quiet*, and—among many other examples from Shakespeare—in the lovely sonnet beginning 'That time of year thou may'st in me behold'. It is often associated with a devotional mood on the part of the poet, and neither the mood nor the quality may be typical of him; yet the constant return of this quietness suggests that it must be typical of the English poetical genius. Of course, the great Carolines such as Herbert and Vaughan were instinct with it; it pervades Milton's early work, *Lycidas* especially, and *Il Penseroso*, and the Sonnet on his blindness; after a very natural evanishment during the reign of Charles II it makes a timid and tentative return in Addison and Prior; then, gaining force, it overflows into the first part of Gray's *Elegy* and finally comes into its own again in Collins's *Ode to Evening*.

Without being in any sense a romantic attribute, this quietness is perfectly compatible with the romantic manner. Indeed, one feels that it ought to accord better with the symmetry, the slow pace, the majestical aloofness of classicism better than it actually *does*. At all events, it returned with the earlier Romantics, remained, though perhaps less happily, with their followers, reasserted its magic with Tennyson, and, except during the short period of which we are now thinking, has never been wholly absent from our literature since. In 1861, however, there was more colour than form in the lyric, as practised by Browning and Morris, more energy than tranquillity, more objective vitality than subjective detachment. It was against this background of rainbow-tinted and trumpet-tongued poems that the beautiful austerity, the hushed rhythms, the gravely sustained imagery of *Up-Hill* stood out in such an arresting fashion.

> Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
> Yes, to the very end.
> Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
> From morn to night, my friend.
>
> But is there for the night a resting-place?
> A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
> May not the darkness hide it from my face?
> You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
  Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
  They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
  Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
  Yea, beds for all who come.

Christina Rossetti was soon to prove that she was capable of very different and much more vigorous utterances than these. She might have exclaimed like the young man in *Love Among the Ruins*:

O heart! O blood that freezes, blood that burns!

and her pulses could beat as fiercely as any one's. To many of her admirers she is the poet of *A Ballad of Boding*, *A Birthday*, *The Convent Threshold*, or *In An Artist's Studio* rather than the poet of *Up-Hill*, *Sleep at Sea*, *Parted*, or *Heaven Over-Arches*. Yet there is this important point of difference and of contrast between her two manners, the colourful and the quiet. When she writes in the Pre-Raphaelite idiom, sees things in Pre-Raphaelite perspective, invests them with Pre-Raphaelite attributes, she is only one of a band of poets working with much the same materials in much the same way: more especially at such times is she the sister of her elder brother, keeping pace with Dante Gabriel if not precisely walking in his footsteps; but when her genius beckons her to a more removed ground, when she—as it were—goes into retreat and, divesting herself of all trammels of ornament or embroidery, concentrates her thoughts in their simplest and most restrained forms, she is most herself and most truly a poet.

Before 1862 we may trace two main sources of inspiration in the poetry of Christina Rossetti. The first is religious, and this influence remained with her to the last. The second is harder to define. It is not precisely profane as contrasted with sacred love. It is not simply love for any particular individual; it is not what is sometimes rather foolishly called the 'love *of* love'. But it probably partakes of both characters. In her ingenuous sentimentality she was a true child of her age. She *did* regard love—in a sentimental sense—as the natural be-all and end-all of a woman's life on earth; and that the cup should twice have been dashed from her own lips left her in a perpetual twilight of regret. She was at one with Queen Victoria in her rather poor opinion of the feminine part of humanity and her intolerance of the intellectual and political

pretensions of womankind. When the Prince Consort died she probably felt vaguely envious even of the Queen's grief, since it was the price exacted for

> Full twenty years of blameless married faith.

Unconscious of her own strength, unaware of the toughness and resilience of her own spiritual fibre, she was always imagining that she wanted to lean on somebody stronger and braver than herself. The two first lines of the *Later Life* sonnets seem to sum up her point of view:

> Let woman fear to teach and bear to learn,
> Remembering the first woman's first mistake;

and Milton himself was not more mercilessly severe on poor Eve than was Miss Rossetti.

Prior to 1862 her second source of inspiration was drawn from two springs; her love—whether authentic or illusory matters little —for one person in particular, and her wistful and romantic ideas about love in general. After 1862, when the Collinson phase was definitely over, these two sources tended to merge into one owing to the new influence brought to bear upon the first. It is no longer an immature infatuation which colours her love-poems; it is now the deep-rooted and enduring passion of a spirit at its full stature for another spirit which it feels to be its peer.

December 5 was a double anniversary in the life of Christina Rossetti. It was her birthday; and upon the eve of her fifty-third birthday Charles Bagot Cayley died. Her acquaintance with him dated back to her girlhood, when he had been one of her father's pupils, but it was not until the early 1860's that acquaintance merged into friendship and friendship into love. Seen through other eyes than Christina's this scholarly recluse seemed a slightly uncouth person, and he was indeed the oddest of shy, shabby, absent-minded men. Deeply versed in many tongues, the translator of Homer, Dante, and Petrarch into English and of the New Testament into the language of the Iroquois Indians, 'he united', says William Michael, 'great sweetness to great simplicity of character, and was not less polite than unwordly'. Undeterred by the fact that he did not possess, and had no prospect of earning, an income sufficient to support a wife and family, Charles Bagot Cayley proposed to Christina Rossetti. It was not his poverty which made the match impossible. William Michael offered him and Christina free quarters in his own house, and by pooling their modest resources the feckless couple could probably have struggled

along well enough. The cause or impediment—and to her it was a very just cause and an absolutely insurmountable impediment—was Cayley's unorthodoxy. Though far from being an aggressive infidel or a convinced Atheist he had reached a state of spiritual detachment, a point of spiritual perspective, at which there seemed to be something good in all creeds. He was willing to acknowledge that there was, on the whole, *more* good in Christianity than in any of the others; but he could not assent to the proposition—vital and fundamental to Christina Rossetti—that it was the one and only true faith, and that all the rest were fond things vainly invented. When she realized this—which she was slow to do—she decided that she could never be his wife. Their friendship, however, continued till his death, a strange, pathetic friendship faintly touched with the colours of the love they had forsworn.

It is to this, the major passion of her life, that we owe many of the finest of Christina Rossetti's poems. The principle upon which she selected her manuscripts for publication is not very easy to determine, for though several of the most ardent and intimate were found after her death, there was, or, at least, there appeared to be, an equal measure both of intimacy and of ardour in several which were given to the world while she yet lived. The *Monna Innominata* sonnets, for example, are as truly Cayley's as the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* are Browning's, and it is Cayley who pervades the rather unequal Italian poems of the *Rosseggiar dell'Oriente* cycle.

Some of her noblest sonnets and several of her loveliest songs were inspired by Cayley, but there is none of these written in the Pre-Raphaelite manner, none with the emotional beauty of *When I am dead, my Dearest*, none with the quivering colours and throbbing rhythms of *A Birthday*, none with the imaginative energy of *The Convent Threshold*. Even the most vehement and vigorous have a sort of mournful restraint upon them. Yet there is, in certain of the *Monna Innominata* sonnets, a pitch of eloquence which Christina seldom attains elsewhere, and which she does not surpass even in her devotional poetry. Take, for example, the octet of the fifth of these sonnets:

> O, my heart's heart, and you who are to me
> More than myself, myself, God be with you,
> Keep you in strong obedience and true
> To Him whose noble service setteth free;
> Give you all good we see or can foresee,
> Make your joys many and your sorrows few,
> Bless you in what you bear and what you do,
> Yea, perfect you, as he would have you be!

There is not a superfluous word, not a superfluous syllable. Except antithesis and anaphora she uses no literary figures, and of image, colour, comparison, there is none at all. The virtue of this sonnet consists in its suggestion of tremendous forces held in reserve, and in its stern and ardent simplicity of phrase. These qualities are characteristic of the Cayley poems from first to last. They are almost colourless; but heaven knows they are not cold!

The same implacable orthodoxy which deterred Christina Rossetti from plighting her troth to the man she loved tormented her with doubts as to his fate in another world, and as to the prospect of any ultimate reunion between her soul and his. She was too orthodox to doubt the existence of such a world; and her orthodoxy was of a grim Calvinistic tinge which forbade her to look forward, with any degree of certitude, to that everlasting joy and felicity of which she dreamed so wistfully and for which she prayed with so much zeal. Curiously enough, she is less apprehensive upon Cayley's account than upon her own. She can sometimes find it in her heart to believe that there must be a residuum of pure gold in what the Calvinists called 'the dross of good works', and that the grace in Cayley's life might outweigh the errors in his creed. More than once she reverts to the idea that she may meet him again hereafter; and it is noteworthy that the poems in which it recurs were mostly left in manuscript. In one of the most characteristic of her Italian songs she exclaims:

> S'io t'incontrassi nell'eterna pace,
> Pace non più, per me saria diletto;
> S'io t'incontrassi in cerchio maledetto,
> Te più di me lamenterei verace.

William Michael Rossetti wondered sometimes if his sister's spiritual home were not really in Rome. To us, contemplating her artless and yet adamantine faith, it seems as if that home lay rather in the town of Dayton and the State of Tennessee. It would not have excited her to see, as we do to-day, science coming to terms with religion, though she would certainly have been perturbed to see religion, in the form of Anglican Modernism, reciprocating the movement. She, who was the contemporary of Darwin, Huxley, and Alfred Russell Wallace, had no use for science as interpreted by them. Their attitude towards all that she held most dear was certainly not conciliatory, and goes far to explain her obscurantist point of view; but one doubts whether she would have been very much happier with Sir Arthur Eddington or Sir James Jeans. 'To learn that something in the Christian faith was credible *because it*

was reasonable went against her', says her brother; yet he is careful to add that 'she was not intolerant of difference of opinion in others', and met 'on terms of close or amicable good will many persons whom she knew to be decided disbelievers'.

It is perhaps a little curious that she, the sister of Dante Gabriel, whose religion—if he had one at all—was purely pictorial or aesthetic, the sister of William Michael, who became an avowed agnostic at the age of fourteen, the sister-in-law of that 'decided disbeliever' Lucy Madox Brown and that inscrutable pagan, Lizzie Siddal, she, the beloved of Charles Bagot Cayley, an eclectic if not precisely an infidel philosopher, should have worn the whole armour of orthodoxy untarnished to the very end. It is true that she had been helmed, girt, and shod by the hands of her beloved mother, teacher, and companion, Frances Polidori Rossetti; and the pervasion of her intelligence by this maternal influence may be sufficient to account for its impenetrability by the fashionable scepticism of the moment, or even by that safe sort of Modernism practised by Tennyson. She had none of the Laureate's active interest in scientific research and discovery, and though she had doubtless been carefully instructed by her mother in the use of the globes, her poetical paths lay through a geocentric universe upon which the sun actually rose and set as it appeared to do. She was not interested in Tennyson's 'dragons of the prime', if, indeed, she considered it lawful to believe in their existence; his visions of the 'heavens filled with commerce', of 'the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue', probably left her quite unimpressed. On the other hand, she was at one with him in rejecting, on the unsupported evidence of instinct, all theories destructive of the fundamental basis of religion, and had known, as he had known, moments when

> like a man in wrath the heart
> Stood up and answered 'I have felt'.

The straitness of Christina Rossetti's orthodoxy has little effect upon her devotional verse, partly because she does not take it on herself to instruct or to dogmatize, to rebut error or to vindicate truth. Whether she is chanting carols and canticles, or meditating upon fasts and feasts, or making orison or imploring mercy, she is always giving expression to some mood, some state of mind or phase of feeling, absolutely simple and passionately sincere: it is in her prose works only that she plunges into labyrinths of pious ratiocination. Sometimes she will work out an idea in verse with some degree of intricacy and ornament, but the idea itself is never

complicated or controversial. Her obvious affinity with Herbert and Vaughan may have been coloured by some knowledge of their works, though it was natural rather than acquired; her affinity with the earlier English mystics, the nameless scribes of the Lambeth and Vernon Manuscripts was almost certainly an innate and unconscious affinity. She draws near to those old verse-mongers not only in the ingenuous fervour of her outlook but also in the occasional quaintness of her metrical forms. She uses dialogue as boldly and as effectively as they; sports with the chirping minikin stanza so dear to the late Plantagenet mind, personifies, invokes, apostrophizes, in the true medieval manner, yet without any deliberate aping of medieval methods. Few subjects exercised a stronger fascination over the fifteenth-century painter than the Epiphany, and few subjects lend themselves better to pictorial treatment in verse. Christina Rossetti reverted more than once to the Adoration of the Kings, always with a heightening of her poetic senses and an acceleration of her poetic pulse. Take, for example, the dialogue between the Three Wise Men and some undefined bystander in her Epiphany hymn written before 1886. The second and third stanzas illustrate admirably this characteristic blending of implicit colour with intricate form:

'Lord Babe, despite Thy youth
I hold Thee of a truth
Both Good and Great:
But wherefore dost Thou keep so mean a state,
Low-lying, desolate?'
'Bow down and worship, righteous seer;
The Lord our God is here
Approachable, Who bids us all draw near.'
'Wherefore to Thee I offer frankincense
Thou Sole Omnipotence!'

'But *I* have only brought
Myrrh; no wise afterthought
Instructed me
To gather pearls or gems, or choice to see
Coral or ivory'—
'Not least thine offering proves thee wise:
For myrrh means sacrifice,
And He that lives, this Same is He that dies!'
'Then here is myrrh; alas, yea woe is me
That myrrh befitteth Thee!'

To call a really good woman-poet a 'poetess' always seems a little unkind. There have been, of course, very many verse-spinning

ladies who deserve nothing better—if, indeed, they deserve as much—and to whom one would hesitate to accord even the 'tempered and mitigate' title of woman-poet. But there are others whom to describe as 'poetesses' would be to affront, such others as Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Christina Rossetti. In the case of Christina I venture to suggest that there are moments when she might well be honoured by the divine title of 'poet'. It is curious that Victorian England should have been the first centre of culture to follow the Greek civilization of the sixth century B.C. and produce a group of women-poets whose poetry merits the name of *poetry*, and is something finer than *verse*. If we omit the somewhat doubtful instance of Sulpicia we can find scant evidence of poetical activity among the ladies of Ancient Rome. Christianity produced a crop of literary nuns, who wrote prayers, hymns, homilies, plays, and—if Dame Juliana Berners be not a sort of female Mandeville—handbooks on the chase; Marie de France and Christine de Pisan during the Middle Ages showed that a lay-woman might dabble in letters and yet live; and the theory that *The Flour and the Lefe* was written by a woman's hand is too fascinating lightly to be relinquished. The Renaissance, though it opened new horizons to women, lifted none of them to great poetic heights, and the Heptameron of Marguerite of Navarre was, perhaps, the sea-mark of their utmost sail. In seventeenth-century France the artificiality of the Précieuses precluded good poetry, though in prose the age of Louis XIV could certainly boast of Mademoiselle de Scudéry and Madame de Sévigné, the one a conscious if mediocre artist, the other an unconscious but an admirable one. In England we had the Matchless Orinda, Mrs. Aphra Behn—and Margaret, the most illustrious and most fantastic Duchess of Newcastle.

As the eighteenth century dwindled into its last decades, women verse-writers multiplied in the United Kingdom on both sides of the Border; and finally, in the first half of Queen Victoria's reign, three women-poets emerge one after another, the birth of each separated from the birth of the next by an interval of twelve years: Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806), Emily Brontë (1818), Christina Rossetti (1830). All three were born before the Victorian Era began, two during the Regency and one under William IV; but the greater part of their work was accomplished between 1837 and 1867, under conditions that were definitely and increasingly Victorian. Of these three it can hardly be doubted that the youngest was the greatest. For nearly forty years Christina Rossetti's reputation has been quietly and steadily growing. Un-

fortunately for that reputation and for us, she was a too prolific and a too facile writer, writing far too much and consigning far too little to the merciful oblivion of the waste-paper basket. For this reason it is not easy to strike a just balance between her best work and her worst. As Owen Meredith observed long since, 'uniformity of good workmanship is the hall-mark of mere talent', and there is no such uniformity in the poems of Miss Rossetti. It now seems natural to us, as it did to Swinburne forty years since, to rank her above Elizabeth Barrett Browning; it has ceased to seem foolish and strange, as it did then to Oscar Wilde and other devotees of the elder lady. Sir Edmund Gosse may have been in some degree responsible for this elevation of the High Priestess of Pre-Raphaelitism to the loftier niche, but it is also due largely to those counterpoised virtues of splendour and austerity, asceticism and passion, candour and restraint which she possessed in a measure so ample and exercised in a manner so great.

When Christina Rossetti closed her unreluctant eyes upon the world, Queen Victoria's reign had still seven years to run, but most of the Victorian giants were gone, and the literature of a new, more restless, more questioning age was fast taking form. In her almost conventual seclusion she can have been aware only dimly—if at all—of the trend of events. Hers was an aloof and alien figure in the England of the young Rudyard Kipling and the youthful George Bernard Shaw, of Wilde and Pinero, W. E. Henley and Francis Thompson, Aubrey Beardsley and James McNeill Whistler. For the two years preceding her death she lived in a sort of half-light, writing little, not reading much, but praying and meditating, and withdrawing herself ever further from all things temporal. For fame she probably cared nothing. Her outlook had altered during the long years that had elapsed since she wrote of

> the dark hair changing to grey
> That hath won neither laurel nor bay,

and she had tamed one by one the cravings of her unsatisfied heart. But, to borrow the words of Swinburne's elegy, there remained

> Girt round with life that is fettered in bonds of time
> And clasped with darkness about as earth is with the sea.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The soul whose song was as music of stars that chime.

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Pamphlet No. 80

Charles Whibley

A Memoir

By

T. S. ELIOT

December 1931

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CHARLES WHIBLEY: A MEMOIR

THERE is a peculiar difficulty, which I experience for the first time, in attempting an estimate of the literary work of a writer whom one remembers primarily as a friend. It is not so much that from a kind of reticence and fear of being uncritical one is inclined to reserve praise: it is rather that one's judgement is inevitably an amalgam of impressions of the work and impressions of the man. Any one who knew Charles Whibley, and had frequent opportunities of enjoying his conversation, will recognize the strength of the impression which his personality could produce in such intercourse, and the difficulty of valuing the writings which remain, apart from the man who is gone.

What adds to the difficulty is the fact that his true place in history is not altogether to be deduced by posterity merely from the writings he has left; and the fact that a great deal of the work into which he threw himself most zealously is of the kind which will be called ephemeral, or only to be consulted, in future, by some scholarly ferret into a past age. It was largely what is called journalism; so that I hope I shall be tolerated in a digression, which is really a preamble, on the nature of the activity which that word loosely denotes. The distinction between 'journalism' and 'literature' is quite futile, unless we are drawing such violent contrast as that between Gibbon's History and to-night's evening paper; and such a contrast itself is too violent to have meaning. You cannot, that is, draw any useful distinction between journalism and literature merely in a scale of literary values, as a difference between the well-written and the supremely well written: a second-rate novel is not journalism, but it certainly is not literature. The term 'journalism' has of course deteriorated in the last twenty years; and it is particularly fitting, in the present essay, to try to recall it to its more permanent sense. To my thinking, the most accurate as well as most comprehensive definition of the term is to be obtained through considering the state of mind, and the type of mind, concerned in writing what all would concede to be the *best* journalism. There is a type of mind, and I have a very close sympathy with it, which can only turn to writing, or only produce its best writing, under the pressure of an immediate occasion; and it is this type of mind which I propose to treat as the journalist's. The underlying causes may differ: the cause may be an ardent preoccupation with affairs of the day, or it may be

(as with myself) inertia or laziness requiring an immediate stimulus, or a habit formed by early necessity of earning small sums quickly. It is not so much that the journalist works on different material from that of other writers, as that he works from a different, no less and often more honourable, motive.

The indignity commonly thrown at the journalist is this, that his work is said to be of only passing interest, intended to make an immediate strong impression, and destined to eternal oblivion after that instant effect has been produced. To say merely this, however, is to overlook the reasons for which writing may be 'ephemeral', and the loose application of that adjective itself, as well as the curious accidents which protect a piece of writing from oblivion. Those persons who are drawn by the powerful attraction of Jonathon Swift read and re-read with enchanted delight *The Drapier's Letters*; and these letters are journalism according to my hint of a definition, if anything is. But *The Drapier's Letters* are such an important item now in English letters, so essential to any one who would be well read in the literature of England, that we ignore the accident by which we still read them. If Swift had never written *Gulliver's Travels*, and if he had not played a striking and dramatic part in political life, and if this amazing madman had not supplemented these claims to permanence by a most interesting private life, what would be the place of *The Drapier's Letters* now? They would be praised now and then by some student of Anglo-Irish history of the epoch who happened by some odd coincidence to have also an exceptional degree of literary acumen; and they would be read by nobody else. The same fate would have overcome the pamphleteering of Defoe, were he not the author of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*; or the pamphleteering of Samuel Johnson, were he not the hero of Boswell. To turn to another great English writer of quite a different kind, let us suppose that John Henry Newman had not been also the great leader of the English Church whose defection Gladstone described as a 'catastrophe'; that he had not played the prominent role in the nineteenth century that he did play; supposing also that the *material* of his *Apologia* was as defunct as the subject of Wood's halfpence in Ireland, who but a few discerning connoisseurs of style would ever read that book now or a century hence? And the *Apologia* of Newman is as surely journalism as is the journalism of Swift, Defoe, or Johnson.

To quote an example on the opposite side: the *Martin Marprelate* tracts are not, certainly, as fine prose as the best of Swift, Defoe, Johnson, or Newman. They belong to a cruder period. But still

they contain some very fine passages indeed, and the whole controversy is on a high literary level. Who reads them now? except a very small number of people, those who interest themselves in the religious squabbles of that epoch, and those few who interest themselves in the prose styles of that epoch. They are not considered a part of the necessary education of the cultivated English-speaking person. Literary style is sometimes assigned almost magical properties, or is credited with being a mysterious preservative for subject-matter which no longer interests. This is far from being absolutely true. Style alone cannot preserve; only good style in conjunction with permanently interesting content can preserve. All other preservation, such as that of Swift's or Defoe's journalism, is due to a happy accident. Even poetry is not immune, though poetry usually concerns itself with simpler and more eternal matters than anything else; for who, except scholars, and except the eccentric few who are born with a sympathy for such work, or others who have deliberately studied themselves into the right appreciation, can now read through the whole of *The Faerie Queene* with delight?

Charles Whibley, then, was a journalist in that he wrote chiefly for occasion, either in his monthy commentary on men, events, and current books; or in his essays and prefaces, or sometimes in a lecture; with the one apparent exception of that charming biographical work, *Lord John Manners and his Friends*. Had he been exactly of my generation, when the typewriter has become the direct means of transmitting even poetry to the page, I am sure that he would have employed that now indispensable engine; as it was, he used suitably a quill pen, but composed rapidly in a small fine hand and made very few *ratures* or corrections. Here again, I may remark, speed and ease are no test of writing one way or the other; and some may hold that the pains of Pater produced less fine prose than the speed of Newman. As for the type of Whibley's style of writing, I think we must look, as we must always look where possible, towards the great writers of the same language in the past with whom the writer has most sympathy, and on whose thoughts his mind has been nourished. His style was fed on the great historical and political writers. Whibley's mind was not an abstract mind; he saw the principle rather through the act. There is a paragraph beginning his essay 'The Trimmer'—an essay on the Marquess of Halifax—which reveals his interest in politics, the angle from which he looked on politics, and the antecedents of his own style:

> Politics is the profession of the second-rate. The man of genius strays into it by accident. We do not need the fingers of both hands to count

the statesmen who have served England since the seventeenth century. The Ministers who have served themselves are like the sands for number. And from this mob of mediocrities it is not strange that very few writers have emerged. It is not an extravagant claim that they should have some mastery of literary expression. Words are the material of their craft. They know not how to use them save in the cause of rhetoric. Charles James Fox, the world was told, was an accomplished man of letters. To hear him discourse of the Classics was almost as fine an experience as to see him take the bank at faro. And then he wrote a book, and his fame was blown away like a bubble. Halifax and Bolingbroke, Burke and Disraeli—these are secure of remembrance. Where shall you find a fifth?

I regret the qualification 'since the seventeenth century', only because I should have liked a reminder of the greater name of Clarendon, whom, however, Whibley dealt with elsewhere. But the paragraph is most illuminating, both upon Whibley's own style, and upon his judgements of political men. He had a particular sympathy with—and a particular gift for explaining and making sympathetic to his readers—three classes of men of letters: statesmen, gentlemen, and ragamuffins. As for the first I think that the paragraph I have just quoted accounts for a bias of judgement sometimes discernible in his general opinions of statesmen: he may, I think, have somewhat overpraised the virtues, and too much extenuated the faults, of Bolingbroke as a statesman, because of the brilliance and vigour of Bolingbroke's style, and the great attraction of his personality. (On the other hand, he seems to me to have given justice to Manners and Smythe against the more brilliant Disraeli.) However, the relation of a statesman's statesmanship to his prose style is not negligible; we can find interesting laboratory material in the writing of Mr. Macdonald, Mr. Lloyd George, and particularly Mr. Winston Churchill.

People sometimes talk vaguely about the *conversational style* in writing. Still more often, they deplore the divorce between the language as spoken and the language as written. It is true that the spoken and the written language can drift too far apart—with the eventual consequence of forming a new written language. But what is overlooked is that an *identical* spoken and written language would be practically intolerable. If we spoke as we write we should find no one to listen; and if we wrote as we speak we should find no one to read. The spoken and the written language must not be too near together, as they must not be too far apart. Henry James's later style, for instance, is not exactly a conversational style; it is the way in which the later Henry James dictated to a

secretary. The famous monologue at the end of *Ulysses* is not the way in which persons of either sex actually *think*: it is a very skilful attempt by a master of language to give the illusion of 'thought' by a different medium, that of written words. There is, however, an essential connexion between the written and the spoken word, though it is not to be produced by aiming at a 'conversational' style in writing, or a periodic style in speech; and I have found this intimate, though indefinable, connexion between the speech and the writing of every writer whom I have known personally who was a good writer—even between the speech and the most recent writing of Mr. James Joyce. Now, one could not say of Whibley, any more than of any one else, that he wrote as he talked, or that he talked as he wrote. Nevertheless, his writings have a quality which relates them more closely to his speech than to the writing of any one else. I know that the word 'sincerity' sounds very vague; yet it represents that moral integrity which unites the prose styles of speech and writing of any good writer: however the rhythm, the syntax, the vocabulary may differ. One cannot, obviously, produce negative instances; I can only repeat that whenever I have known both the man and the work of any writer of what seemed to me good prose, the printed word has always reminded me of the man speaking.

One of the phrases of commendation which Whibley often used, at least in conversation, about the style of another writer, was (even when he had little sympathy with the matter) that it had *life* in it; and what makes his own prose hold one's attention, in spite of, perhaps, indeed emphasized by, its relation to remote models in the history of English literature, is that it is charged with life. He gives always the impression of fearless sincerity, and that is more important than being always right. One always feels that he is ready to say bluntly what every one else is afraid to say. Thus a feeling of apprehensiveness, conducive to attention, is aroused in the reader. And, in fact, he was, when he chose to be, a master of invective. Now invective is a form of writing which varies at different times and in different countries according to the customs and laws in vogue at the time and in the place. It is now the fashion to deplore the decay of abuse. Certainly, the rules of the game are altered. Many years ago, in an open letter to Lord John Russell, Disraeli addressed Lord John as an 'insignificant insect'. I am not aware that a duel, or even a solicitor's letter followed; yet when I used the same phrase about a contemporary in a letter to a journal, my letter was rejected on the ground that it might possibly be considered libellous. Well,

that does not matter; for however the rules of the game may be tightened, it is all the more stimulating to the connoisseur in controversy to do what he can according to the actual rules; and once the rules are recognized, a mild statement may carry all the force of a more violent statement under laxer rules. Indeed, I think that we, looking at the daily vollies of that great French master of vituperation, Léon Daudet—who was, incidentally, a friend of Whibley—become fatigued by the very licence which this amazing journalist permits himself, and feel that a little less liberty in abuse would refine the point of sarcasm. When I add to the name of Daudet, that of a master of a very different, and much more austere style, Charles Maurras, I have named with Whibley the three best writers of invective of their time. There is a great deal of fuss nowadays about freedom of speech, but very few persons nowadays care really about genuine *plain speaking*. 'Free speech' has become narrowed down to speaking freely about sex, sexual irregularities and sexual perversions; it has become the peculiar privilege of World-Leaguers for Sexual Reform; but few, so far as I am aware, now claim the free speech to call a knave a knave or a fool a fool. *And knaves and fools we both abhorred alike* says Dryden in his noble epitaph on Oldham; perhaps nowadays our abhorrence is blunted by habituation.

The *Musings Without Method* which Whibley contributed once a month to Blackwood's for thirty years, excepting two months, one of which was the last, are the best sustained piece of literary journalism that I know in recent times. Daudet is sometimes tiresome and Maurras sometimes dull, and both are iterative; Mr. Wyndham Lewis, the most brilliant journalist of my generation (in addition to his other gifts) often squanders his genius for invective upon objects which to every one but himself seem unworthy of his artillery, and arrays howitzers against card houses; but Whibley always had the tact to vary his objects of attack and to vary his methods according to the object. Whether he was opposing the act of a Government, or giving his opinion of Gladstone, or objecting to the insistent advertisements of what he held to be a debased Encyclopaedia Britannica, or denouncing the project of a National Theatre, or speaking his mind about Mr. Pinero or Mr. Jones or Mr. Edmund Gosse or the Omar Khayyam Club, he modulated his thunders according to the tree, shrub, or weed to be blasted. Nor did he ever hold too long to one topic. There would be a sudden transition to something else: a book of travels that he liked, or French wines and cookery. And what excites my particular admiration is the skill of these transi-

tions. It looks artless; as if he had exhausted the subject for the moment, and had turned quite at random to another. But I have for some months been going slowly through these *Musings*, with a view to making an anthology, primarily of those paragraphs which are concerned with literature and art. It has been like trying to carve a bird with flexible bones but no joints; you remove one paragraph from a monthly *Musing*, a paragraph apparently self-contained, and unrelated to what precedes and to what follows, and something has gone out of it. The anthology will be made, but it will, I fear, have the same relation to the month's *Musing* that a falcon skilfully stuffed in the attitude of flight has to the living flash or swoop through the air. It is because the *Musings* were methodically 'without method' that they were so living. Whibley followed faithfully and easily the movement of his own mind; he did not, as I and most people do, have to think up half a dozen subjects to talk about and then shuffle them into the most suitable order; the transition from one subject and the next was given by his own mind. Critics sometimes comment upon the sudden transitions and juxtapositions of modern poetry: that is, when right and successful, an application of somewhat the same method without method. Whether the transition is cogent or not, is merely a question of whether the mind is *serré* or *délié*, whether the whole personality is involved; and certainly, the whole personality of Whibley is present in whatever he wrote, and it is the unity of a personality which gives an indissoluble unity to his variety of subject.

In attaining such unity, and indeed in attaining a *living* style, whether in prose or in verse, the practice of conversation is invaluable. Indeed, I believe that to write well it is necessary to converse a great deal. I say 'converse' instead of 'talk'; because I believe that there are two types of good writers: those who talk a great deal to others, and those, perhaps less fortunate, who talk a great deal to themselves. It is two thousand and hundreds of years since, that the theory was propounded that thought is conversation with oneself; all literary creation certainly springs either from the habit of talking to oneself or from the habit of talking to others. Most people are unable to do either, and that is why they lead such active lives. But any one who would write must let himself go, in one way or the other, for there are only four ways of thinking: to talk to others, or to one other, or to talk to oneself, or to talk to God.

Whibley had another quality, not unrelated to the preceding, which is essential for the literary critic. The first requisite of

literary criticism, as of every other literary or artistic activity, is that it shall be interesting. And the first condition of being interesting is to have the tact to choose only those subjects in which one is really interested, those which are germane to one's own temper. Universality of knowledge is a less chimerical ideal than universality of taste; but there is a kind of saturation in the text of an author, more important than erudition. Whibley had this discretion, that of the *honnête homme* as critic, to select subjects suited to his own temperament. Learning he had and scholarship. He was a good Grecian, and no Hellenist. His standards of classical scholarship were acquired from such devoted scholars as R. A. Neil, but having acquired them he wore them easily. He did not, like some more pretentious and pontifical critics, occupy himself with reviewing and bluepencilling literary reputations already well established, or adding one more superfluous essay to the bibliography of some already over-criticized author. In consequence, he has added to English criticism a number of essays on subjects which have never been so well handled (if handled at all) in the past, and to his treatment of which there will be little to add in the future; and has thereby made a secure place for himself in criticism.

I have said earlier that he took a particular delight in men of letters who were gentlemen or ragamuffins; perhaps his greatest enjoyment and amusement was in men of letters who were something of both. His appreciation of Sir Thomas Urquhart, Christianus Presbyteromastix, descended from Adam the Protoplast, with his *Ekskubalauron* and his *Logopandekteison*, as well as his great translation of Rabelais, is the best possible introduction to that author. As in politics Whibley saw theory through men, so in literature he was at his best, and indeed most just in his criticism, when the author of an admired work was also a man after his own heart. Another essay which shows this delight in personality, even to the point of conjecture, is his essay on Petronius. Who else would have thought to remark of the author of the Satyricon that he 'was a great gentleman'? but the phrase, as used here by Whibley, has its proper significance. It is not, however, true that he often distorted the literary value because of his enjoyment of the author's personality; he is able to say truly that 'Petronius is as secret as Shakespeare, as impersonal as Flaubert'. On the other hand, he is able to appreciate the book even when one feels that he has some dislike of the author, as with Laurence Sterne. And in the essay on Petronius his amused and Catholic delight in what he called 'the underworld of letters' is as well expressed as anywhere.

> You may meet Encolplus to-day (he says) without surprise or

misunderstanding. He haunts the bars of the Strand, or hides him in the dismal alleys of Gray's Inn Road. One there was (one of how many!) who after a brilliant career at the University, found the highway his natural home, and forthwith deserted the groves of learning for the common hedgerow of adventure. The race-course knew him, and the pavement of London; blacklegs and touts were his chosen companions; now and again he would appear among his old associates, and enjoy a taste of Trimalchio's banquet, complaining the while that the money spent on his appetite might have been better employed in the backing of horses. Though long since he forgot he was a gentleman, he always remembered that he was a scholar, and, despite his drunken blackguardism, he still took refuge in Horace from the grime and squalor of his favourite career. Not long since he was discovered in a cellar, hungry and dishevelled; a tallow candle crammed into a beer-bottle was his only light; yet so reckless was his irresponsibility that he forgot his pinched belly and his ragged coat, and sat on the stone floor, reciting Virgil to another of his profession. Thus, if you doubt the essential truth of Petronius, you may see his grim comedy enacted every day . . .

I would not give the impression, however, that Whibley's service to letters was simply to fish up from the bottom of the past its forgotten and outmoded cranks and whimsies, any more than it was to descant amusingly upon greater and well-known writers. His peculiar merit as a critic, I think, resided in the combination of this personal gusto and curiosity, with a faculty of just literary appreciation. If he talked of Lucian or Herondas otherwise than professors do, he did not see them out of scale with the greatest masterpieces of Greek literature, nor did he merely bring forth a pleasant chat. He was not a bookish critic in the style of James Russell Lowell. And if he talked of the minor writers and journalists of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, with whom he had so much sympathy and for whom he had so much charity, it was never to elevate them above their proper place. The history of literature, he might have said, is always being simplified into a Hall of Fame of dusty noble statues and a list of names such as are used for decorating the domes of libraries. But the *honnête homme* in literary appreciation cannot be satisfied to worship a few mummified reputations; he must have the imagination and the heart to desire to feel literature as something alive; and we can touch the life of the great works of literature of any age all the better if we know something of the less.

As I said before, Whibley had what is perhaps the first of all critical gifts, without which others are vain: the ability to detect the living style from the dead. (And I may interject parenthetically,

that though he never criticized in print any of the writers of my own generation, I found in conversation that he was able to recognize vitality even in writers with whom he had little sympathy.) It is largely owing to his insight and enthusiasm, as well as to his editorial toil, that the Tudor Translators have become recognized as they deserve. In his appreciation of these humble workmen and great prose writers, he shows the recognition of the life, not merely of men, but of speech, as expressed in a note which he wrote many years ago on Henry Bradley's *The Making of English* (*Blackwood's*, Aug. 1904, p. 280):

> He, therefore, is the finest master of style who never loses hold of the past, who feels, what he can only express to minds as knowing as his own, that the words of his choice have each its own pedigree and its own life. Nor will he limit himself either to Saxon or to Latin. He will use the full resources of his speech with a justified pride, remembering that our language has as many colonies as our King, and that in this one respect at least we are the resolute conquerors of the world.

It is in such ways as I have indicated, not aspiring to any literary dictatorship or pontificate, or to academic or extra-academic honours, and never caring to express his mind except on what really interested him or excited his admiration or indignation, that Charles Whibley made and holds his place in literary criticism. He was too modest, and had too varied tastes and interests in life, to care to be the monumental critic; and indeed, the monumental and encyclopaedic critic is to be regarded with a carefully appraising eye; for the monument is sometimes constructed either by indifference to literature or by indifference to life. Criticism, certainly, was only a part of his activity in life; and in being only a part, it is genuine in its kind. I had no intention in this paper to estimate his place in the tradition social and political which is represented by his connexion with W. E. Henley and his early labours on the *Scots Observer* and the *National Observer*; that is the subject-matter of other chapters; I allude to them merely as a reminder of the place of his literary essays in his work.

There is a passage in one of his *Musings without Method*, celebrating the late Professor York Powell of Oxford. (*Blackwood's*, June 1904, p. 860 ff.) which I may be permitted to transcribe with suitable excisions and slight alteration, as applicable by analogy to its author:

> There was nothing that had happened in the past which was not of living interest to him. No man of his time had a deeper acquaintance with life, literature, and policy . . . He was, for instance, the first or

second expert (for he had a rival) in the history of the Prize Ring. We remember once that, the art of pantomime being mentioned in his presence, he was ready with a complete biography of Dubureau, together with an account of the pantomimes which Gautier and Charles Nodier wrote for him. This is but a single instance, taken at random, of his multifarious knowledge . . . His knowledge of literature outstripped the common boundaries of this country or that . . . but his chief interest was perhaps in the French poetry of the newest school. He spoke French and understood it with an ease and a skill that is given to few Englishmen . . . Like the late W. E. Henley, with whom he had many points of . . . sympathy, he was a keen upholder of some oppressed citizens, and at the same time a sturdy Jingo, where the interests of England were involved . . . While the egoism of most men inspires them to the composition of a work which shall make them forever famous, (he) lavished his gifts in talk, and made his friend a sharer, as it were, in his own talent . . . In conversation no subject came amiss to him, because he was familiar with all; but he was so richly endowed with humour that he regarded nothing with an overserious eye . . . The result is that, while his contemporaries will do full justice to his temperament and omniscience, he may appear to posterity, which knew him not, as far less than he really was . . . But he has lived his life; he has scattered his learning with a generous hand; he has bequeathed a memory of affection to all who knew him; he has set his mark on works of younger men . . . And who shall say that this achievement is not greater than half a dozen volumes in octavo?

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WILLIAM COWPER

By

LORD DAVID CECIL

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WILLIAM COWPER

WHEN I first received the invitation to give this lecture to-night, I was filled with exaltation and delight; for I felt it so great an honour to address so distinguished an audience. But on second thoughts I am afraid my pleasure became mingled with a little anxiety, for the subject which I had to lecture on seemed such a large one to deal with in so short a space of time. Cowper is not one of those authors whom we know only from their works. He is a life and a man as much as a writer; and to give a full and just account of that life and that man and that writer would involve, I think, some adequate consideration of the subject of the eighteenth century, of poetry in general, of friendship, of religion, and of lunacy.

Who was I in a brief three-quarters of an hour to touch adequately on such diverse and such tremendous subjects? It was obvious I had to make a choice; and since I had already fatigued many readers with an account of Cowper's life, I chose his works—to discuss Cowper primarily as a writer.

I think we must admit at once that he was not one of the very greatest writers in the sense that Milton and Wordsworth were. His art was not the centre and fulfilment of his life, its unrivalled sovereign and lodestar. Indeed, as you know, its larger portion is letters, which were not written primarily with a literary intention at all, but like other letters to communicate with his correspondents.

He only began to write poetry on any large scale when he was past forty; and then he did it as a distraction. And though he wrote most carefully and conscientiously, because he was careful and conscientious in whatever he did, it remained distraction. It was never the full expression of his life.

Nor were his character and interests those of the typical artist. His life divides itself into two great categories, and neither of them includes the artist.

The normal side of him was the natural product of his circumstances and surroundings, the world from which he sprang; and that world was the world of the English professional classes and country gentry in the eighteenth century, I should think the most calm, placid, and regular set of people that could be found in the history of England; their lives—especially those who lived in the country, with which Cowper was most intimately connected—

revolving round the twenty- or thirty-mile radius in which they lived; the men spending their time in sitting on the Bench and hunting, and playing cards for low stakes; the women playing cards too, going for walks, needlework, and a great deal of gossip. It is the same world that we see described so ironically and brilliantly by Jane Austen thirty or forty years later. And Cowper was a typical example of this world.

He was no rebel genius like Shelley or Byron, striving against the bonds of the society which he found himself in. Nor did he retire to some inner dream-world of his own creation like Emily Brontë. No, he was very much like the people among whom he lived. He had the same views and the same opinions. He was more intelligent, more sensitive, and had a great deal more power of expressing himself. But what he wanted to express was very much what they wanted to express. He was a scholarly gentleman of moderate views, opposed to revolution, opposed to tyranny, restricted by the proprieties, on the side of respectability, interested in all the mild, pleasant, conventional interests and avocations of social life of his time. He had some special, peculiar, distinguishing tastes, his love of nature and his interest in his friends, but neither of these took any eccentric form.

The country he loved was the country he knew—the pleasant, civilized, tame country of the Home Counties—and he loved it with no visionary, Wordsworthian, mystical feeling, but for what it was, as it was. He loved it as one loves an old and valued friend. His friendships too, though they were very strong, were not at all feverish or violent, except that with Lady Austen. They involved no dramas: they were for the most part steady, quiet, unchanging sentiments, founded on esteem, cemented by habit. And though his sensitiveness and delicacy made him seek his friends first of all among women, yet he was very careful to keep his relations with them on a most decorous basis, shrinking from the thought of a love affair. The life he liked best was a quiet, kindly, family life, full of small innocent pleasures, walks, picnics, cosy tea-drinkings, readings aloud, fireside talks. Such was his normal side. It does not seem a congruous setting for the exhibitions of the artistic temperament.

But, of course, his normal is only one side of him. He had a very abnormal side too. Round the sunny, grassy field of his ordinary existence brooded the shadow of religious madness, and his life resolved itself into a battle fight to the death between the sunny sanity of his ordinary life and the powers of darkness hidden in his heart.

It was a long struggle, and he fled for consolation to religion; and for a short period—for six years—lifted on the wings of religious ecstasy, he managed to keep them at bay. But this consolation failed him. The battle was resumed, and in the end the powers of darkness defeated him.

Again on this side, the side of his melancholy madness and his religious exaltation, art plays no serious part. It could not form the chief occupation and interest of his life, because the interests of his life lay outside this province. And his literary achievement shows this.

It is, as I said, divided into two parts, his letters and his poetry; and I think his letters are the best. It is natural that they should be, for the letter is the literary form which bests suits a man not primarily interested in literature. A letter is not, first of all, a conscious work of art. Some letters are, but I think they are great failures. We all know of them, those casual notes written for posterity, full of careful carelessness and exhibitionist intimacy. They are very common among the letters of professional writers; and for that reason often the unliterary write much better letters than the literary.

Then again as friendship and intimacy were perhaps his primary pleasures in life, the letter was obviously his best form of expressing it. And, as a matter of fact, I think his letters are equal to any that have ever been written; the perfected expression of a natural genius for intimacy. They are the very opposite of consciously well-written letters. Of these, indeed, Cowper had a horror. He could not admire Pope's letters because he felt they were written to be read out; he thought one should destroy a letter the moment one received it.

But his letters are the very opposite of carelessly written scrawls. They are composed in a lucid, sparkling, unforced English; every little note begins with a beautiful well-turned phrase and ends gracefully. They are beautifully adapted, too, to harmonize with the mood of his particular correspondent. If he writes to Newton, he writes with gravity of religious things. If he writes to Unwin, more playfully: to Lady Hesketh, with a sort of lyrical gaiety.

He had not much to write about; so little happened to him. His letters express whatever moods chased themselves across his mind as he sat in the greenhouse or in the winter by the candle-lit table. But no letters have such variety because no letters have such variety of mood. Grave to gay, light to darkness, smiles to tears, so the varying moods effortlessly, perfectly succeed each other.

May I read one or two examples.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, Feb. 9, 1786.

. . . . And now, my dear, let me tell you once more, that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects, the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse, and its banks, everything that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors, but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May, or the beginning of June, because before that time my green-house will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, rose, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present: but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made: but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the farther end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long. Order yourself, my Cousin, to the Swan at Newport, and there you shall find me ready to conduct you to Olney.

My dear, I have told Homer what you say about casks and urns, and have asked him, whether he is sure that it is a cask in which Jupiter keeps his wine. He swears that it is a cask, and that it will never be anything better than a cask to eternity. So if the god is content with it, we must even wonder at his taste, and be so too.—Adieu! my dearest, dearest Cousin.

W. C.

Extract from letter to the Rev. John Newton.

March 29, 1784.

Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at a window, than be absolutely excluded. In a minute, the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour, were filled. Mr.

Grenville, advancing toward me, shook me by the hand with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he and as many more as could find chairs were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the less, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, the draper, addressing himself to me at this moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion, by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which not being sufficient as it should seem for the many nice and difficult purpose of senator, he has a third also, which he wore suspended by a riband from his button-hole. The boys halloo'd, the dogs barked, Puss scampered, the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquillity, never probably to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued; and which, had I been possessed of it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side of the former.

So much for his letters.

His poems, I think, are not so good. The best poetry needs a higher pitch of feeling than mere friendly intimacy. And besides, Cowper had not that perfect felicity of style, that indissoluble marriage of word and thought, which characterize the work of the very greatest poets. 'After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well.' 'When the still morn went out with sandals gray.' Cowper never wrote like that. No, he was content to use the conventional poetic diction founded on Pope and Milton which the eighteenth century thought correct for serious poetry.

All the same he had considerable poetic gifts. He had an extraordinary power of observation: he could isolate that telling detail in a landscape or a scene which makes it vivid to the eye. And he had a most beautiful ear for metre. Again I do not think it extended to the great majestic metres; the Miltonic blank verse in which he wrote so much of his most important poetry is a little nerveless and unmelodious. Its folds seem to cramp the dancing of his poetic feet.

Neither has he the lyric genius that soars like a bird from the page of Shelley and Burns. But for the elegiac lyric, the deliberate

quiet song, careful yet full of feeling, his ear was perfect. And he can vary its simple measures indefinitely; so that sometimes the poem marches with a martial tread, sometimes it dances light as an elf, sometimes trembles to silence in a dying fall.

Finally, he had the instinct for form. No more than his metrical ear did this extend to his biggest poems: it was not strong enough to impose an order on an enormous mass of material. But for the shorter lyric it is perfect. Ordinary and conventional the words may be; but they follow each other in the only right order. The first line can only be the first line, and the last line closes the poem certain and inevitable and satisfactory as the key chord at the end of an air.

Like everybody else, he is best when he writes about what he likes. He writes well when he can give rein to his florid eighteenth-century patriotism, his strong conviction that the English are far better and stronger than everybody else in the world, and always will be in every way.

On the Loss of the 'Royal George'

Toll for the brave—
The brave! that are no more:
All sunk beneath the wave,
Fast by their native shore.
Eight hundred of the brave,
Whose courage well was tried,
Had made the vessel heel
And laid her on her side;
A land-breeze shook the shrouds,
And she was overset;
Down went the *Royal George*,
With all her crew complete

Toll for the brave—
Brave Kempenfelt is gone,
His last sea-fight is fought,
His work of glory done.
It was not in the battle,
No tempest gave the shock,
She sprang no fatal leak,
She sprang upon no rock;
His sword was in the sheath,
His fingers held the pen,
When Kempenfelt went down
With twice four hundred men.

Weigh the vessel up,
Once dreaded by our foes,

And mingle with your cup
The tears that England owes;
Her timbers yet are sound,
And she may float again,
Full charg'd with England's thunder,
And plough the distant main;
But Kempenfelt is gone,
His victories are o'er;
And he and his Eight hundred
Must plough the wave no more.

He wrote still better when he described that English countryside which alone in his narrow life provided an object for his love of visual beauty. Here his exquisite gift of observation tells. With the brilliant minuteness of a Dutch master he can isolate that particular detail which will bring the whole landscape vivid and fresh as in life before one's eyes.

From THE TASK, BOOK V

The Winter Morning Walk

'Tis morning; and the sun, with ruddy orb
Ascending, fires th' horizon: while the clouds,
That crowd away before the driving wind,
More ardent as the disk emerges more,
Resemble most some city in a blaze,
Seen through the leafless wood. His slanting ray
Slides ineffectual down the snowy vale,
And, tinging all with his own rosy hue,
From ev'ry herb and ev'ry spiry blade
Stretches a length of shadow o'er the field,
Mine, spindling into longitude immense,
In spite of gravity, and sage remark
That I myself am but a fleeting shade,
Provokes me to a smile. With eye askance
I view the muscular proportion'd limb
Transform'd to a lean shank. The shapeless pair,
As they design'd to mock me, at my side
Take step for step; and, as I near approach
The cottage, walk along the plaster'd wall,
Prepost'rous sight! the legs without the man.
The verdure of the plain lies buried deep
Beneath the dazzling deluge; and the bents,
And coarser grass, upspearing o'er the rest,
Of late unsightly and unseen, now shine
Conspicuous, and, in bright apparel clad
And fledg'd with icy feathers, not superb.
The cattle mourn in corners where the fence

Screens them, and seem half petrified to sleep
In unrecumbent sadness. There they wait
Their wonted fodder; not like hung'ring man,
Fretful of unsupply'd; but silent, meek,
And patient of the slow-pac'd swain's delay.
He from the stack carves out th' accustom'd load,
Deep-plunging, and again deep-plunging oft,
His broad keen knife into the solid mass:
Smooth as a wall the upright remnant stands,
With such undeviating and even force
He severs it away: no needless care,
Lest storms should overset the leaning pile
Deciduous, or its own unbalanc'd weight.
Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcern'd
The cheerful haunts of man; to wield the axe
And drive the wedge, in yonder forest drear,
From morn to eve his solitary task.
Shaggy, and lean, and shrewd, with pointed ears
And tail cropp'd short, half lurcher and half cur—
His dog attends him. Close behind his heel
Now creeps he slow; and now, with many a frisk
Wide-scamp'ring, snatches up the drifted snow
With iv'ry teeth, or ploughs it with his snout;
Then shakes his powder'd coat, and barks for joy.

The third great category of Cowper's poetry arises, of course, from his interest in domestic life, his personal poetry, and this in its turn can be divided into four groups.

First, his interiors; they exhibit his gift for detail as brilliantly and as exactly as his landscapes. 'I sing the sofa,' he says, at the beginning of his most famous poem, and this might stand as a motto to all this section of his work. He sings the sofa and the conversation on the sofa, the writing-table beside the sofa and the fire burning so cheerily in front of the sofa, and the chess-board and cards and books that lie on the desk at the back of the sofa. His picture is exquisite and exact as those of a Chardin.

From THE TASK, BOOK IV

The Winter Evening

Just when our drawing-rooms begin to blaze
With lights, by clear reflection multiplied
From many a mirror, in which he of Gath,
Goliath, might have seen his giant bulk
Whole, without stooping, tow'ring crest and all,
My pleasures, too, begin. But me, perhaps,
The glowing hearth may satisfy awhile

With faint illumination, that uplifts
The shadow to the ceiling, there by fits
Dancing uncouthly to the quiv'ring flame.
Not undelightful is an hour to me
So spent in parlour twilight: such a gloom
Suits well the thoughtful or unthinking mind,
The mind contemplative, with some new theme
Pregnant, or indispos'd alike to all.
Laugh ye, who boast your more mercurial pow'rs,
That never feel a stupor, know no pause,
Nor need one; I am conscious, and confess,
Fearless, a soul that does not always think.
Me oft has fancy, ludicrous and wild,
Sooth'd with a waking dream of houses, tow'rs,
Trees, churches, and strange visages, express'd
In the red cinders, while with poring eye
I gaz'd, myself creating what I saw.
Nor less amus'd have I quiescent watch'd
The sooty films that play upon the bars,
Pendulous, and foreboding, in the view
Of superstition, prophesying still,
Though still deceiv'd, some stranger's near approach.
'Tis thus the understanding takes repose
In indolent vacuity of thought,
And sleeps and is refresh'd. Meanwhile the face
Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask
Of deep deliveration, as the man
Were task'd to his full strength, absorb'd and lost.
Thus oft, reclin'd at ease, I lose an hour
At ev'ning, till at length the freezing blast,
That sweeps the bolted shutter, summons home
The recollected pow'rs; and, snapping short
The glassy threads, with which the fancy weaves
Her brittle toys, restores me to myself.
How calm is my recess; and how the frost,
Raging abroad, and the rough wind, endear
The silence and the warmth enjoy'd within!

He deals also with the humorous side of family and friendly life. Not only in his well-known burlesque poems like 'John Gilpin', but also in his satire, his humorous comment on the happenings and personalities of life in a country village. He will point out with precision and gentle irony the types: hypocritical old maid, bookish squire, hunting parson. I will read to you from his masterpiece in this line, 'Conversation', in which he describes the various themes of conversation which he does not enjoy listening to, and they have altered very little.

From CONVERSATION

The wrangler, rather than accord with you,
Will judge himself deceiv'd, and prove it too.
Vociferated logic kills me qûite;
A noisy man is always in the right—
I twirl my thumbs, fall back into my chair,
Fix on the wainscot a distressful stare,
And, when I hope his blunders are all out,
Reply discreetly—To be sure—no doubt!
  Dubius is such a scrupulous good man—
  Yes—you may catch him tripping if you can.
He would not with a peremptory tone,
Assert the nose upon his face his own;
With hesitation admirably slow,
He humbly hopes—presumes—it may be so.

A story, in which native humour reigns,
Is often useful, always entertains:
A graver fact, enlisted on your side,
May furnish illustration, well applied;
But sedentary weavers of long tales
Give me the fidgets, and my patience fails.
'Tis the most asinine employ on earth,
To hear them tell of parentage and birth,
And echo conversations, dull and dry,
Embellish'd with—*He said*, and *So said I.*
At ev'ry interview their route the same,
The repetition makes attention lame;
We bustle up with unsuccessful speed,
And in the saddest part cry—*Droll indeed!*
The path of narrative with care pursue,
Still making probability your clue.

Th' emphatic speaker dearly loves t' oppose,
In contact inconvenient, nose to nose,
As if the gnomon on his neighbour's phiz,
Touch'd with a magnet, had attracted his.
His whisper'd theme, dilated and at large,
Proves after all a wind-gun's airy charge,
An extract of his diary—no more,
A tasteless journal of the day before.
He walk'd abroad, o'ertaken in the rain
Call'd on a friend, drank tea, stept home again,
Resum'd his purpose, had a world of talk
With one he stumbled on, and lost his walk,
I interrupt him with a sudden bow,
Adieu, dear Sir! lest you should lose it now.

Then again he is the master of what may be called the occasional poem. Mrs. Throckmorton sent him some flowers, or Lady Austen played on the harpsichord, or he took down a book from a shelf and was struck by some lines in it; and then carefully and quietly he goes to his writing-desk, and in his neat hand turns out a copy of verses on the occasion. These little poems of his are fragile, but they are delightful of their kind. They never rise above the tone of conversation, but behind the actual words, like the vibration of a violin, sounds always that muted music which deepens them into poetry.

On observing some names of little note recorded in the 'Biographia Britannica'

Oh, fond attempt to give a deathless lot
To name ignoble, born to be forgot!
In vain, recorded in historic page,
They court the notice of a future age:
Those twinkling tiny lustres of the land
Drop one by one from Fame's neglecting hand:
Lethaean gulphs receive them as they fall,
And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all.
So when a child, as playful children use,
Has burnt to tinder a stale last year's news,
The flame extinct, he views the roving fire—
There goes my lady, and there goes the squire.
There goes the parson, oh—illustrious spark,
And there, scarce less illustrious, goes the clerk!

Finally, he sometimes turns more serious and sings the affections and sorrows of home and family life. And here he touches a higher strain. They were his deepest feelings, and indeed home and family affections are among the deepest of human feelings; in their expression he achieves the intensity of great poetry. I would like to read them all. How much better you should hear them than anything I have to say. But time presses. All the same, I cannot forbear to quote some of the poem on his mother's picture.

From ON THE RECEIPT OF MY MOTHER'S PICTURE OUT OF NORFOLK

The Gift of my Cousin Ann Bodham

My mother! when I learn'd that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
Wretch even then, life's journey just begun?

Perhaps thou gav'st me, though unseen, a kiss;
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss—
Ah that maternal smile! it answers—Yes.
I heard the bell toll'd on thy burial day,
I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away,
And, turning from my nurs'ry window, drew
A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu!
But was it such?—It was.—Where thou art gone
Adieus and farewells are a sound unknown.
May I but meet thee on that peaceful shore,
The parting sound shall pass my lips no more!
Thy maidens griev'd themselves at my concern,
Oft gave me promise of a quick return.
What ardently I wish'd, I long believ'd,
And, disappointed still, was still deceiv'd;
By disappointment every day beguil'd,
Dupe of *to-morrow* even from a child.
Thus many a sad to-morrow came and went,
Till, all my stock of infant sorrow spent,
I learn'd at last submission to my lot;
But, though I less deplor'd thee, ne'er forgot.

Where once we dwelt our name is heard no more,
Children not thine have trod my nurs'ry floor;
And where the gard'ner Robin, day by day,
Drew me to school along the public way,
Delighted with my bauble coach, and wrapt
In scarlet mantle warm, and velvet capt,
'Tis now become a history little known,
That once we call'd the past'ral house our own.
Short-liv'd possession! but the record fair
That mem'ry keeps of all thy kindness there,
Still outlives many a storm that has effac'd
A thousand other themes less deeply trac'd.
Thy nightly visits to my chamber made,
That thou might'st know me safe and warmly laid;
Thy morning bounties ere I left my home,
The biscuit, or confectionary plum;
The fragrant waters on my cheeks bestow'd
By thy own hand, till fresh they shone and glow'd;
All this, and more endearing still than all,
Thy constant flow of love, that knew no fall,
Ne'er roughened by those cataracts and brakes
That humour interpos'd too often makes;
All this still legible in mem'ry's page,
And still to be so, to my latest age,
Adds joy to duty, makes me glad to pay
Such honours to these as my numbers may;

Perhaps a frail memorial, but sincere,
Not scorn'd in heav'n, though little notic'd here.
Could time, his flight revers'd, restore the hours,
When playing with thy vesture's tissued flow'rs,
The violet, the pink, and jessamine,
I prick'd them into paper with a pin,
(And thou wast happier than myself the while,
Would'st softly speak, and stroke my head and smile)
Could those few pleasant hours again appear,
Might one wish bring them, would I wish them here?
I would not trust my heart—the dear delight
Seems so to be desir'd, perhaps I might—
But no—what here we call our life is such,
So little to be lov'd, and thou so much,
That I should ill requite thee to constrain
Thy unbound spirit into bonds again.

So much for Cowper's normal side. But his abnormal also finds expression in literature. Incidentally, it is responsible for some of his less good poetry. He took to writing after religion had ceased to be a consolation to him, but when he still in theory believed in it; and therefore he fills up a lot of his nature and home poetry with stodgy moralizing and trite religious platitude.

The Didactic was not his forte at all. It was too public to be a form of expression for one so shy and individual. He is very famous, of course, as a hymn writer, but I think myself that he has perhaps been over-praised if you consider the poems as hymns, i.e. as songs written for corporate singing at public worship, expressing the singing of a congregation. Many of them, however, are not hymns in that sense at all, but personal religious poems, confessions of the hopes and fears and joys of his own individual religious life. And they are most touching and most beautiful. Let me read one of the less well-known ones.

The Contrite Heart

The Lord will happiness divine
On contrite hearts bestow:
Then tell me, gracious God, is mine
A contrite heart, or no?

I hear, but seem to hear in vain,
Insensible as steel;
If aught is felt, 'tis only pain,
To find I cannot feel.

I sometimes think myself inclin'd
To love thee, if I could;
But often feel another mind,
Averse to all that 's good.

My best desires are faint and few,
I fain would strive for more;
But when I cry, 'My strength renew,'
Seem weaker than before.

Thy saints are comforted, I know,
And love thy house of pray'r;
I therefore go where others go,
But find no comfort there.

Oh, make this heart rejoice, or ache;
Decide this doubt for me;
And if it be not broken, break,
And heal it, if it be.

And, of course, there were moments when religious consolation, and domestic happiness alike, failed him; and he surrendered himself to the indescribable agony of fear and sorrow which had him in its grip. And then from time to time there would rise a piercing cry unlike anything else in his poems. For a second time he touches the intensity of great poetry; and with a greater force perhaps than anywhere else.

The Shrubbery

Oh, happy shades—to me unblest!
Friendly to peace, but not to me!
How ill the scene that offers rest,
And heart that cannot rest, agree!

This glassy stream, that spreading pine,
Those alders quiv'ring to the breeze,
Might soothe a soul less hurt than mine,
And please, if anything could please.

But fix'd unalterable care
Foregoes not what she feels within,
Shows the same sadness ev'ry where,
And slights the season and the scene.

For all that pleas'd in wood or lawn,
While peace possess'd these silent bow'rs,
Her animating smile withdrawn,
Has lost its beauties and its pow'rs.

The saint or moralist should tread
  This moss-grown alley, musing, slow;
They seek, like me, the sacred shade,
  But not, like me, to nourish woe!

My fruitful scenes and prospects waste
  Alike admonish not to roam;
These tell me of enjoyments past,
  And those of sorrows yet to come.

But his masterpiece in this kind is his last poem 'The Castaway'. Alas, I have no time to read more than the final stanzas.

From THE CASTAWAY

No poet wept him: but the page
  Of narrative sincere,
That tells his name, his worth, his age,
  Is wet with Anson's tear.
And tears by bards or heroes shed
Alike immortalize the dead.

I therefore purpose not, or dream,
  Descanting on his fate,
To give the melancholy theme
  A more enduring date:
But misery still delights to trace
Its semblance in another's case.

No voice divine the storm allay'd,
  No light propitious shone;
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
  We perish'd, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulphs than he.

By a strange paradox of human nature in this his final valediction to his life of unexampled disaster, the cruel fate which has destroyed him stimulates him to his finest achievement; his life's frustration became its own fulfilment.

Such then is Cowper's poetic achievement, and you will have noticed something peculiar about it. Most poets are the greatest when they transcend their personal circumstances. They speak, it is true, from the deepest part of themselves; but they add something to the personal experience of which they are writing, 'the light that never was on land and sea, the consecration and the poet's dream.'

Shakespeare's Sonnets, for example, express his feeling for the young man and the dark lady most wonderfully, but their very splendour seems to take one out of the individual case. One feels

Shakespeare speaking for all friends and all lovers. You forget about the particular story in the universal emotion. But Cowper at his best is at his most personal. His nature poetry is at its best when he is describing the England he knows. You feel that is exactly what he knows. If somebody came from the stars to ask what the Home Counties were like, you could tell him to read Cowper.

Again, his satire is not like anybody else's. You feel he is not attacking all fools but those particular fools he knew, and that is why he describes them so well.

His hymns too are the most successful when they are the most personal. Finally, when he expresses his feeling for his mother, you do not feel, as with Shakespeare, that Cowper is speaking for all sons; you feel it is Cowper speaking about that particular mother. And the personal details, the 'confectionary plum', the visits to his bedroom, are what gives its vividness and poignancy to the poem.

Of course, the expression of his despair does transcend its popular circumstances: such a cosmic emotion could not involve so many accidental daily details. But even then what makes it poignant is that you feel it is the record of a real experience. It is the unexaggerated statement by a human being that life is to him without joy or hope. Nor, strangely enough, does the artificial diction detract from the reality of this. It makes it seem more genuine.

Personal melancholy and the domestic affections are the two subjects in which Cowper touched his greatest heights; and they are the two subjects which stand to suffer the most from the slightest suggestion that the writer is not sincere, that he is trying to exploit his deep feelings in order to impress his hearers. The moment one is conscious of such exploitation pleasure completely vanishes; to be succeeded by a nausea at the indecent sentimentality of the exhibition.

Cowper's formal eighteenth-century phrasing, his balanced metres are like a veil of reticence and modesty and good taste interposed between the page and the reader; which allows him to say the most intimate and sacred things without embarrassment. And this, more than any other, is the distinguishing characteristic, the identification mark, of Cowper's work; and which discriminates it so decisively from the more romantic melancholy of Christian Rossetti or the Tennyson of 'Tears, idle tears', with which his actual mood has much in common. It was the consequence of his age. The eighteenth century was peculiarly suited to the expression of ordinary intimate personal emotions. It was a settled, quiet age;

the voice of the individual was not drowned by the roar of abstract theory and enthusiastic movements. Yet its iron regularity of manners and habit imposed an order on the expression of personal feeling which prevented it from degenerating into mere 'sob stuff'.

The very limitations which prevent Cowper reaching the highest rank of poets, his normal ordinary tastes and character, the intense personal quality which I have spoken of, which distinguishes his most successful poems; these combine to give him peculiar, unique position.

If we want visions of unearthly beauty or rhapsodies of passion we must go to other poets; but visions of unearthly beauty and rhapsodies of passion play a very small part in most people's lives; and if we wish to read about the simple, steady pleasures and affections which are the sources of the deepest happiness to ninety-nine out of a hundred people, walks in the wood, talks by the fireside, the laughter with old friends over jokes and old times, the well-worn, well-loved room in which we have lived since children, the remembered sound of the church clock, the hollyhocks standing up so bravely over the vicarage wall, all the thousand tender, daily ties that bind us to friends and family and home,—if it is these of which we wish to read, we turn to Cowper.

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L'ALLEGRO AND *IL PENSEROSO*

BY

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MILTON: *L'ALLEGRO* AND *IL PENSEROSO*

The question whether Day or Night is preferable . . . might seem better suited to a poetical exercise than to a contest of rhetoric. MILTON, *First Prolusion.*

I

IT has been the habit to associate *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* with Milton's life at Horton. By their simplicity, their avoidance of politics and religious controversy, their descriptions of rural scenes, they have seemed to fit perfectly into the one period when Milton lived at a long stretch in the country. 'They represent him', wrote Mr. John Bailey, 'in his simplest mood, the mood of the quiet years at Horton, spent more than any other part of his life, in the open air, and among plain folk unlettered and unpolitical.' In these poems at least, people have felt, they can find a Milton who does not disturb them with the qualities they resent in the other poems, a Milton free from the ferocity of *Lycidas*, the heart-searchings of *Paradise Lost*, or the inhospitable bareness of *Paradise Regained*. It has even been possible to throw over them a Rousseauish glamour, to think of them as the reveries into which Milton fell as he ruminated down the lanes of Buckinghamshire. Pre-eminent in this fashion is the description in Masson's *Life of Milton*, a passage which deserves to be perpetuated as one of the curiosities of Victorian criticism.

Look back, reader, and see him as I do! Now, under the elms on his father's lawn, he listens to the rural hum, and marks the branches as they wave, and the birds as they fly; now, in the garden, he notes the annual series of the plants and the daily blooming of the roses. In his walks in the neighbourhood, also, he observes not only the wayside vegetation, but the whole wide face of the landscape, rich in wood and meadow to the royal towers of Windsor and the bounding line of the low Surrey hills. Over this landscape, changing its livery from day to day, fall the varying seasons. . . . And these seasons have each their occupations. Now the plough is afield; now the sower casts the seed; now the sheep are shorn; now the mower whets his scythe. . . . In summer the twilight steals slowly over the lawn, and, seated at the open window, the poet, who has heard the lark's carol abroad by day, will listen, in the stillness, for the first song of the nightingale; and, when the night is farther advanced, may there not be a walk on the lawn, to observe the trembling tops of the poplars, and to drink, ere the soul is done with that day more, the solemnising glory of the tranquil stars? Look on, thou glorious youth, at stars and trees, at the beauties of day and the beauties of night, at the changing aspects of the seasons, and at all that

the seasons bring! No future years of thy life, perchance, will be so happy and calm as these; and a time comes, at all events, when what thine eye shall have already gathered of nature's facts and appearances must suffice thee for ever, and when, judging thy chambers of imagery sufficiently furnished, God will shut thee in!

Not the scenery alone about Horton, but the little society of the village itself, becomes gradually known to the scrivener's thoughtful son. As he saunters along the road, handsome and fair-haired, the field-labourers and servants touch their hats to him, and think him a little haughty. . . . Every Sunday, he is one of the little congregation in Horton Church, when all Horton is gathered under his eye; and, as he sits in the pew with his father and mother, and listens to Mr. Goodal's sermon, mayhap the presence of the young scholar and critic from Cambridge moves Mr. Goodal to a more ingenious strain than need be, and secures for the parish their rector's very best.

I have quoted this as a curiosity and as an instance of how *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* have often been thought of; not to deride Masson's *Life of Milton*. To deride what is at once the best informed and the least informing of all the great literary biographies in English would indeed be easy enough. Masson with his patriarchal manner, his treacly sentiment, and his sabbatical Nonconformity is the very simplest game for modern sophistication. Nor can it be pleaded that he imparts, for all his six enormous volumes, the faintest glow of life to his picture of Milton: his mountain of facts is shapeless and incoherent. And yet Masson was a great man, and, though he has done Milton much harm, not unworthy to be his biographer. His enterprise in undertaking a work on so lavish a scale and his resolution in carrying it out with no abatement of energy and thoroughness to the last page have something of the heroic about them. He never spares himself, exploiting to the utmost every fragment of information that can have the slightest bearing on Milton's life, and in his lavishness throwing in much that cannot possibly have any. He reminds me of nothing so much as of those great Victorian kitchen-ranges, which for all their lamentable waste of coal and heat did somehow succeed in warming the bath-water and loading the dining-table with something which however heavy was certainly food. The last word of any one who has picked up a few crumbs from the feast of Masson should be of gratitude and admiration.

Well, Masson or no Masson, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* have been very persistently associated with Horton; and superficially the resemblance between the themes of the poems and Milton's country life is plausible enough. But it does not go very deep. Milton had already spent vacations in the country; and there is no

specific reference to Buckinghamshire. And in actual fact, *was* Milton mainly occupied in his Horton days with loitering down the hedgerows? Apparently not, for it was at Horton that he settled down to the most concentrated spell of study he ever undertook. To realize Milton's state of mind there, it is necessary to read the prose composition written shortly before he left the University. I mean the *Seventh Academic Exercise* or *Prolusion*, for it is here that he gives us his own ambitions and the scheme of universal knowledge which he has set himself to pursue. Written not long before he went to Horton, it looks forward, picturing the dominant state of his mind in the years that followed. His theme is the defence of Learning against Ignorance. He begins by saying that to be competent in the art of rhetoric—and there can be no mediocrity in rhetoric any more than in poetry—a man must 'acquire a thorough knowledge of all the arts and sciences to form a complete background to his own calling'. And he goes on to complain that his present task has broken in on the studious leisure to which he had settled down. As, in the body of his speech, he surveys the fields of knowledge, he grows intensely excited and betrays the ardour of his own ambitions. There is nothing to compare, he cries, with the joys of Learning.

> What a thing it is to grasp the nature of the whole firmament and of its stars, all the movements and changes of the atmosphere, whether it strikes terror into ignorant minds by the majestic roll of thunder or by fiery comets, or whether again it falls softly and gently in showers or dew; then perfectly to understand the shifting winds and all the exhalations and vapours which earth and sea give forth; next to know the hidden virtues of plants and metals and understand the nature and the feelings, if that may be, of every living creature; next the delicate structure of the human body and the art of keeping it in health; and, to crown all, the divine might and power of the soul, and any knowledge we may have gained concerning those beings which we call spirits and genii and daemons. There is an infinite number of subjects besides these, a great part of which might be learnt in less time than it would take to enumerate them all. So at length, gentlemen, when universal learning has once completed its cycle, the spirit of man, no longer confined within this dark prison-house, will reach out far and wide, till it fills the whole world and the space far beyond with the expansion of its divine greatness.[1]

Then he goes on to praise geography and history, history which 'wrests from grudging Fate a kind of retrospective immortality',

[1] This and the other quotations from the *Prolusions* are taken from *Milton: Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises*, translated from the Latin by P. B. Tillyard (Cambridge University Press).

and ends his survey with a hint of what rewards in private life the truly learned man may obtain:

> to be the oracle of many nations, to find one's house regarded as a kind of temple, to be a man whom Kings and states invite to come to them, whom men from near and far flock to visit, while to others it is a matter for pride if they have but set eyes on him once. These are the rewards of study, these are the prizes which learning can and often does bestow upon her votaries in private life.

It was the pursuit of these ambitions which had been interrupted and to which at Horton Milton must have returned. Professor J. H. Hanford has shown from his analysis of Milton's notebook that at Horton he settled down, among other things, to a comprehensive study of world history from the original authorities, beginning from the beginning as he conceived it and proceeding in chronological sequence. The conventional picture of the seraphic young 'Lady of Christ's' with his auburn hair gently admiring the view and yearning over the rustics must give way to that of a man striving, in a concentrated and delighted fury of study, to compass the whole circle of human knowledge.

Of course, the more accurate picture of Milton at Horton does not prove that he did *not* write *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* there. It proves that it would not be surprising if he did not write them there. If he did write them there, they are to be considered *πάρεργα*, not expressing the experiences that mainly held his mind at the time. And such hitherto I have considered them: 'a delightful recreational interlude in the comprehensive studies undertaken at Horton'.

I have, however, never been very happy in my mind about *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, I mean about where they come in Milton's poetic development. Nor indeed, for all their apparent simplicity, have I been able hitherto to guess what Milton was aiming at when he wrote them. Almost all Milton's early poems were composed for a special occasion, as if he needed some extrinsic persuasion to take him off his main business—even the lines *On Time* were 'set on a clock case': *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* suggest no occasion; without Horton they are in the air, isolated. I hope that I have got evidence for relating them to Milton's University days, but before giving it for what it is worth, I should like to speak of the poems themselves, and of certain difficulties they present.

2

I hope I have shown that the supposed evidence for connecting the poems and Horton amounts to nothing: first because Milton's

main preoccupations at Horton are *not* the main preoccupations of the poems, second because their rusticity would fit equally well with some vacation spent by Milton in the country. Indeed, within the poems there is no evidence for fixing a date: the passages of other authors which Milton undoubtedly imitates or refers to are all too early to affect the issue.[1] Against the poems' belonging to the Horton period is their absence from the Trinity Manuscript, in which the undoubted Horton poems occur. It is an inconclusive piece of evidence but not negligible, and it has encouraged Professor Hanford acutely to conjecture that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* belong to the very beginning of the Horton period or even 'go back to some vacation interval in Milton's university life'.

And now, what of the poems themselves?

> Hence loathed Melancholy
> Of *Cerberus*, and blackest midnight born,
> In *Stygian* Cave forlorn
> 'Mongst horrid shapes, and shreiks, and sights unholy,
> Find out som uncouth cell,
> Where brooding darknes spreads his jealous wings,
> And the night-Raven sings;
> There under *Ebon* shades, and low-brow'd Rocks,
> As ragged as thy Locks,
> In dark *Cimmerian* desert ever dwell.

That is the opening of *L'Allegro*, and it is one of the most puzzling passages in the whole of Milton; what possessed him that he should write such bombast? By what strange anticipation did he fall into the manner of the worst kind of eighteenth-century ode? If Milton meant to be noble, he failed dreadfully. If, however, he knew what he was doing, he can only have meant to be funny. And if he meant to be funny, to what end? There is nothing in the rest of the poem that suggests humour—at least of the burlesque sort.

Here, then, at the outset, is a difficulty. But it is isolated, for there is no such obvious shock elsewhere in either *L'Allegro* or *Il Penseroso*. On the contrary, both poems present a superficial simplicity of structure, of thought, and of language. The structure is one of simple progressions and self-evident contrasts; far less intricate than that of *Lycidas* for instance. There is no thought that is not easily grasped at once. Apart from a couple of minor

[1] Professor Grierson in his introduction to the Florence edition of Milton's poems cites an analogy with Shirley's masque *The Triumph of Peace*, dated 1634. The analogy seems to me too vague to signify greatly; and even if it did, Shirley might be copying Milton.

syntactical difficulties the language is extremely lucid. This does not mean that the poems are shallow. Take the couplet

> Hard by, a Cottage chimney smokes,
> From betwixt two aged Okes.

This is simple language, but as poetry the lines are not negligible. We all know that cottage, but the picture we each make is different from our neighbour's. And it is Milton who makes us make our picture. His outline compels us to fill in the detail. His means—and I doubt whether they can be called simple—are drastic economy of detail and musical suggestion. The heavy beat of the first line has nothing to do with the smoke; it suggests squatness and the quality of being solidly based, in the cottage. Statement and rhythm are doing different jobs of work. The rhythm of the second line rises a little at the end—the oaks are tall—and has something carelessly solid in it—the oaks know their own dignity. (I am well aware of the dangers of talking in this strain; I merely wish to say with some emphasis that the couplet has substance.)

On account of their simplicity the poems give a quick return for any effort expended on them, and hence have attracted a large number of readers. They are the most popular of all Milton's poems. Nor are they the worse on this account. The virtue of good poems with a quick return is very great, in that they convey valuable experiences to those who lack the time or the intellect to grapple with the more difficult. The pity is that there are so few of them, compared with the bad simple poems that produce a swift harvest of fraud.

The mood of the poems is one of an even serenity; not one of the ecstatic serenity that can follow the assuaging of a mental upheaval. They are the work of a young man free for the time from the growing-pains and fevers of youth. We like *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* as we like people when they are happy and tolerant; when they stimulate without exacting too much, do not disturb us by wanting sympathy or by springing fresh notions on us, and are content to enjoy the present. And this analogy easily leads to another quality, best explained in terms of what Dr. I. A. Richards in his *Practical Criticism* has called *tone*.

> The speaker has ordinarily an attitude to his listener. He chooses and arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic or deliberate recognition of his relations to them. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation, his sense of how he stands towards those he is addressing. . . . Tone, as a distinct character in a poem, is less easy to discuss than the others, and its importance may easily be

overlooked. Yet poetry, which has no other very remarkable qualities, may sometimes take very high rank simply because the poet's attitude to his listeners—in view of what he has to say—is so perfect. Gray and Dryden are notable examples. Gray's *Elegy* indeed, might stand as a supreme instance to show how powerful an exquisitely adjusted tone may be. It would be difficult to maintain that the thought in this poem is either striking or original, or that its feeling is exceptional. It embodies a sequence of reflections and attitudes that under similar conditions arise readily in any contemplative mind. Their character as commonplaces, needless to say, does not make them any less important, and the *Elegy* may usefully remind us that boldness and originality are not necessities for great poetry.

These passages say something that sounds very obvious when once it has been said, but which apparently had not been said and which is extremely helpful. They also contain the only remark I have read that does anything to explain the excellence of Gray's *Elegy*. I fancy that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are the most popular of Milton's poems because of their subtle friendliness of tone. Some poets deliberately exclude the reader's participation: these are the perversely obscure. Others, though admitting the reader if he likes to participate, do not invite. Others invite—Horace or Goldsmith. Others still, pester—Hugo and Whitman are apt to pester. Others again are coquettish: they pretend to be very aloof, but are really inviting very hard—a romantic vice, to be seen in Byron and the legion of the misunderstood. In *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* Milton displays a perfect social tone. He reduces his idiosyncrasies to a minimum, without at all ceasing to be his characteristic self.

Now this social tone is here connected, as it was in the eighteenth century, with the general and the particular. The eighteenth century disapproved of the personal, the recondite, or the technical, because it thought them anti-social: they could not be enjoyed, as all the parts of poetry should, by all men of taste. Milton is more generalized in these poems than in any other of his early works. Consider first the case of personal feeling. It is a commonplace that both the Cheerful and the Meditative Man are Milton, and yet there is not the least suspicion that he calls attention to himself. He is no more particularized than the narrator of the *Deserted Village*, nor more important than the shadowy actor who tells the story of *Wuthering Heights*. When he asks 'Mirth to admit him of her crew', we do not feel that he is trying to exclude others: he is a perfectly well-bred and nebulous Everyman seeking admission to a company whose decorous abstractness would accord with

the politest eighteenth-century taste. How prophetic too of the same century are the last lines of *Il Penseroso*, when the Meditative Man utters his hopes of ending his years like a hermit:

> And may at last my weary age
> Find out the peacefull hermitage,
> The Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell,
> Where I may sit and rightly spell
> Of every Star that Heav'n doth shew,
> And every Herb that sips the dew;
> Till old experience do attain
> To somthing like Prophetic strain.

The 'Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell' are quite impersonal, a polite fiction as truly social as their supposed sentiment is anti-social. The eighteenth century was constantly praising the joys and virtues of blameless retirement.

If the supposed speaker is impersonal, most of the pleasures he enjoys in either of his moods are such as could be shared by any contemporary of decent intelligence and reasonable leisure, and they are uncomplicated by the slightest political or religious controversy. In Milton's youth an educated man was still a musician, and there was nothing vulgar or recondite about the Fairy Mab.

Not that Milton consistently generalizes. On the contrary he can vary the general by a flash of the particular; witness the way he describes the shower in *Il Penseroso*.

> Thus night oft see me in thy pale career,
> Till civil-suited Morn appeer,
> Not trickt and frounc't as she was wont,
> With the Attick Boy to hunt,
> But Cherchef't in a comly Cloud,
> While rocking Winds are piping loud,
> Or usher'd with a shower still,
> When the gust hath blown his fill,
> Ending on the russling Leaves,
> With minute drops from off the Eaves.

Here the fancy of the Morn 'Cherchef't in a Cloud', though it would have offended the eighteenth century, was perfectly seemly in the 1630's. The myth of the 'Attick Boy', Cephalus, who forsook Procris to hunt with Eos, told so charmingly by Ovid, is part of the general stock of mythology; it is beautifully set off by the particular observation, the unaffected realism of the 'minute drops from off the Eaves'. The contrast is not quite violent enough to suggest the wit of the Metaphysicals, but it betokens an awakened

sensibility. Similarly, in the matter of language, one can compare the quiet generality of

> And who had *Canace* to wife,
> That own'd the vertuous Ring and Glass,
> And of the wondrous Hors of Brass,
> On which the *Tartar* King did ride,

(where Milton in his unobtrusiveness seems to step aside and give place to the actual *Squire's Tale* of Chaucer) with the purely individual 'antick Pillars massy proof'.

Milton, then, in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, succeeds largely through his tone. He tactfully and without undue insistence invites his readers to share his experiences. He adjusts his expression to suit his guests, but never so drastically as to obliterate the sense of his own presence.

3

Scholars have not been backward in seeking the literary origins of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Apart from many minor references there are passages that clearly imitate or recall unconsciously poems of Burton, Beaumont and Fletcher, Breton, and Marston. Of these only Burton's poem—*The Author's Abstract of Melancholy* prefixed to the *Anatomy*—has any general bearing. This poem is a dialogue between the pleasing kind and the unpleasing kind of melancholy in the author's brain, and, though this contrast evolves with but small resemblance to Milton's, it is sufficient to have suggested the plan of Milton's poems. But the analogy tells us very little: nothing about the nature of Milton's poems and nothing about their date. There is, however, another analogy, hitherto undetected, which tells us a great deal more. To put it briefly *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* grew out of Milton's *First Academic Exercise* or *Prolusion*.[1]

Milton's *Prolusions* are exercises in Latin, written from time to time while he was at Cambridge, to fulfil the requirements for getting his degrees. Such exercises were the equivalent—inherited from the Middle Ages—of the modern examination. They were not mere essays, but pleadings in a public debate. The disputant had to be ready to compose his speech in support of either side of the subject at issue, as ordered. Thus in his *Seventh Prolusion*, on the merits of Learning and Ignorance, Milton mentions that he first intended to champion Ignorance but had been allowed to

[1] When I wrote my introduction to the translation of Milton's *Prolusions* referred to above, I had not detected this analogy.

change sides. Anyhow, the academic disputation meant a contrast, whether of eulogies or of an attack and a defence.

The *First Prolusion* cannot date later than July 1628, because in it Milton refers to the hostility of the undergraduates to him, which had disappeared by the time he delivered the *Vacation Exercise* or *Sixth Prolusion* at that date. It therefore antedates *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Concerned with the subject *Whether Day or Night is the more excellent*, it advocates the superior excellence of day. It begins with an elaborate inquiry into the mythical genealogy of Night and Day; goes on to describe the dawning of day and the glory of the sun; and ends by praising day and abusing night. Milton elaborated the mythology in order to display, as it was his business to do, the extent of his classical learning, and to indulge a rather artless and engaging form of burlesque humour. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* both begin with mythical genealogies, of Mirth and Melancholy respectively, with less elaboration than the *Prolusion* but (in view of other resemblances) in undoubted imitation of it. The mythology finished, *L'Allegro*, like the *Prolusion*, goes on to describe the day-break, and in such similar terms as to leave no doubt that here the *Prolusion* is its original. Here is the prose account:

> Even the birds cannot hide their delight, but leave their nests at peep of dawn and noise it abroad from the tree-tops in sweetest song, or darting upwards as near as they may to the Sun, take their flight to welcome the returning day. First of all these the wakeful cock acclaims the sun's coming, and like a herald bids mankind shake off the bonds of sleep and rise and run with joy to greet the new-born day. The kids skip in the meadows, and beasts of every kind leap and gambol in delight. The sad heliotrope, who all night long has gazed toward the east, awaiting her beloved Sun, now smiles and beams at her lover's approach. The marigold too and rose, to add their share to the joy of all, open their petals and shed abroad their perfume, which they have kept for the Sun alone, and would not give to Night, shutting themselves up within their little leaves at fall of evening. And all the other flowers raise their heads, drooping and weighed down with dew, and offer themselves to the Sun, mutely begging him to kiss away the tear-drops which his absence brought. The Earth too decks herself in lovelier robes to honour the Sun's coming, and the clouds, arrayed in garb of every hue, attend the rising god in festive train and long procession.

In *L'Allegro* the lark who sings 'from his watch tower in the Skies' corresponds to the birds in the passage quoted which 'dart upwards as near as they may to the Sun'. And in both the cock

is mentioned immediately after the birds. The Cheerful Man,[1] in the poem, comes to the window and bids good morrow to the dawn; in the prose, mankind is bidden to 'shake off the bonds of sleep, and rise and run to greet the new-born day'. Closest of all are the descriptions of the clouds attending the rising sun: compare the last words of the prose passage with

> Wher the great Sun begins his state,
> Rob'd in flames, and Amber light,
> The clouds in thousand Liveries dight.

Later in the *Prolusion* Milton pictures the world's predicament if bereft of day and says:

> In vain would the earth bring forth in abundance vines twining in many a winding trail, in vain nobly towering trees.

It may be that

> Through the Sweet-Briar, or the Vine,
> Or the twisted Eglantine,

and

> Boosom'd high in tufted Trees,

echo this.

There remains one important detail of resemblance. The first lines of *L'Allegro*, already quoted and found so puzzling, are derived from one or two passages in the *First Prolusion*. Here are the most relevant:

> Day is the eldest daughter of Heaven, or rather of his Son, begotten by him, it is said, to be the comfort of the race of men and the terror of the infernal god, for fear lest Night should rule unopposed, lest Ghosts and Furies and all that loathsome brood of monsters, unchecked by any barrier between Earth and Hades, should leave the pit of Hell and make their way even to the upper world, and lest wretched Man, enveloped and surrounded by murky darkness, should suffer even in this life the tortures of the damned.
>
> None will you meet save ghosts and spectres, and fearsome goblins who follow in Night's train from the realms below; it is their boast that all night long they rule the earth and share it with mankind. To this end, I think, night sharpens our hearing, that our ears may catch the sooner and our hearts perceive with greater dread the groans of spectres, the screeching of owls and night-birds, and the roaring of lions that prowl in search of prey.

And a little lower down Milton speaks of 'Cimmerian darkness'. The resemblance of these passages to the opening of *L'Allegro* is

[1] If he, and not the lark, is the subject of *com* in line 45 of *L'Allegro*. The corresponding passage in the *Prolusion* might help to settle the question.

too strong to need proving in detail; Milton must have had them in mind when he began the poem. Now in their context they are plainly burlesque, especially the second; and it can hardly be doubted that the opening of *L'Allegro* is burlesque also. If so, what was he burlesquing? Immediately, himself. In 1626, when he was seventeen, Milton wrote an ambitious little poem in Latin hexameters on the Gunpowder Plot. He must have concluded that he was trying too much, because he brought it to an abrupt close without recounting the main part of the story in any detail at all. It shows power, but it is crude and bombastic. Milton must very soon have learnt to see its defects. Here is the passage which he may have been parodying in *L'Allegro* and which is certainly behind parts of the *First Prolusion*:

> Est locus aeternâ septus caligine noctis
> Vasta ruinosi quondam fundamina tecti,
> Nunc torvi spelunca Phoni, Prodotaeque bilinguis
> Effera quos uno peperit Discordia partu.
> Hic inter caementa jacent semifractaque saxa,
> Ossa inhumata virûm, et trajecta cadavera ferro;
> His Dolus intortis semper sedet ater ocellis,
> Jurgiaque, et stimulis armata Calumnia fauces,
> Et Furor, atque viae moriendi mille videntur,
> Et Timor, exanguisque locum circumvolat Horror,
> Perpetuoque leves per muta silentia Manes
> Exululant, tellus et sanguine conscia stagnat,[1]

Behind all three places in Milton there is of course a complex of 'horrid' writing, which need not be discussed—Virgil, Seneca, the University Wits, Giles and Phineas Fletcher—and he may be glancing at the whole mode as well as at his immature self. The question *why* Milton should have opened *L'Allegro* with burlesque will have to wait till a much more important likeness between the pair of poems and the *First Prolusion* has been propounded.

As stated above, an academic disputant had to be ready to support either side of a question set for debate. It is highly probable that Milton had considered what was to be said in favour of night as well as writing his speech in favour of day; that he had the

[1] 'There is a place hedged in by the eternal gloom of night, once the vast foundation of a ruined abode, now the cave of fierce Murder and double-tongued Treason, whom savage Discord bore at one birth. Here among quarry-stones and broken rocks lie the unburied bones of men and bodies pierced with steel. Here sits dark Fraud for ever with distorted eyes, and Strife, and Calumny, her jaws armed with spikes, and Rage. Here are seen a thousand ways of death. And Fear and pale Horror flit round the place; and continually the insubstantial ghosts howl through the dumb silence, and the earth in sympathy drips with blood.'

idea of the contrasted eulogy in his mind. Now Johnson objected to Milton's Cheerful Man and Meditative Man because they were too much alike; and it is perfectly true that they do not supply much contrast to their poems. Nevertheless, the poems *are* sharply contrasted, and the contrast is that between day and night. *L'Allegro* written in praise of day corresponds to the *First Prolusion*; *Il Penseroso* written in praise of night corresponds to what Milton would have said had he been called on to take the other side. The contrast can be worked out in the most precise detail. Melancholy, in *L'Allegro*, is at the opening connected with blackest midnight; Mirth is the daughter of the dawn. Both poems move in a simple progression of time. In *L'Allegro* the progression begins with dawn. The lark startles the *dull* night, and the cock routs retreating night like the stragglers of a defeated army, he 'scatters the rear of darkness thin'. Homage is paid to the source of daylight—'the great Sun begins his state'. The action progresses through the day till in the evening the Cheerful Man carries his cheerfulness into the hostile realms of night by entering the festivities of the town. Hymen carries her taper, and mask and pageantry suggest the light of many candles. *Il Penseroso* is constructed on the same lines, with night and darkness substituted for day and light. The sun is futile, serving merely to show the foolish motes that hover in its beams. Melancholy is dressed in sober black. The progression of time begins with the evening and the nightingale's song. It is to the credit of the embers indoors that they give little light: they counterfeit a gloom. The Meditative Man watches all night and invokes the night ('thus night oft see me in thy pale career'); and when day comes he carries his midnight meditations into the hostile realms of day. Day dawns chastened, hidden in a cloud. 'And when the sun begins to fling his flaring beams' the Meditative Man prolongs night into day by seeking 'twilight groves'. Day is hostile, and he seeks to hide himself from 'Day's garish eie' either by sleep or by taking refuge in the 'dimm religious light' of a cathedral. In fact from first to last the poems are constructed on the contrasted eulogy of day and night.

I hope the case for deriving *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* from the *First Prolusion* has been made convincing. Here is the last piece of evidence. When Milton wrote the *First Prolusion* he had already connected its subject with poetry, for he says:

> The question whether Day or Night is preferable is no common theme of discussion, and it is now my duty, the task meted out to me this morning, to probe the subject thoroughly and radically, though it

might seem better suited to a poetical exercise than to a contest of rhetoric.

L'Allegro and *Il Penseroso* are the 'poetical exercise' on this theme.

4

If Milton derived the idea of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* from an oration addressed to a university audience it is probable that he had a similar audience in mind when he composed the poems. Does such an assumption either explain any of their difficulties, or conspicuously fit any of their characteristics?

One difficulty was the bombast with which *L'Allegro* begins. As it stands, with no background, it is meaningless. There is nothing else like it within the poem to check any conjecture as to its character. It is not organic; and to explain it, extrinsic data are necessary. But an academic audience would not have found it obscure; it would have seen the humour as readily as the Classical Sixth at a Public School would fall to a burlesque of Greek tragedy. Every undergraduate would know Ovid with his endless mythology and would be perfectly familiar with the notion of burlesquing it—even without having read *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Directly they heard of Melancholy being born of Cerberus and blackest midnight—infamous coupling—they would have a comfortable sense of familiarity and recognition, and begin to grin. Not only would an academic audience be specially quick to detect the burlesque; it would feel more keenly the force of the opening in the context of the poem. Milton's object is to build up an opening which both in theme and rhythm shall contrast as strikingly as possible with the joy and swing of

But come thou goddess fair and free,

breaking in so suddenly. All readers of course appreciate the contrast—indeed they have found the mere clash of differences so delightful that they have omitted to look closely at one of the colliding bodies. The contrast has been considered merely one of gloom and lethargy with light and movement. But an academic audience would have got more of a shock; it must have had its breath fairly taken away by the sudden swing from the familiar, deliberately dismal melodrama to a joyous and serious beauty. Indeed, I have a slight suspicion of a 'stunt', a suspicion confirmed by Milton's having treated his college audience to things not so very different before. In his *Prolusions* he is very fond of alternating the sublime and the ridiculous, and sometimes does so with a good deal of charm. The most impressive example is when, in the

Sixth Prolusion, he follows his comic speech with the sublime rhetoric of his *Lines at a Vacation Exercise*. But if a 'stunt', how admirably calculated to delight and impress an undergraduate audience! Indeed it is only in relation to such an audience that the passage under discussion can be either understood or justified. How it can be understood has been discussed: as the high spirits of a young man it can perhaps be justified.

The social tone of the poems is far more appropriate to Cambridge than to Horton. Milton's last years at College were, with the possible exception of his Italian visit, the period of his early life when such a tone is most to be expected. At first he had not been popular and had thought poorly of his fellows, but by the time of the *Sixth Prolusion*, July 1628, the situation had changed. He says that the old hostility towards him has just changed to friendship and generosity. Moreover, he could not have been invited to take the chief part in so important an affair as this Vacation Exercise had not his talents been appreciated. It is plain that he responded very warmly to the change of opinion and that he was conscious of the social obligations that resulted from it. It is pretty certain that from the summer of 1628 till he took his M.A. in 1632 he was an important person at the University, and that he enjoyed being one. The confidence bred of an appreciative audience and the desire to requite appreciation by considering that audience's likes and dislikes seem to me to be the precise accompaniment to which the airs of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are set. And the end of *Il Penseroso*, the prayer for the 'peaceful hermitage' in 'weary age', how charmingly callow, how perfectly appropriate to an audience of boys (one must not forget how young they went to college in those days)! It fits far worse the lips of a man who has retired into studious quiet already. The assumption then that Milton had an academic audience in mind when he wrote *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* seems to me completely justified.

The absence of the poems from the Trinity Manuscript brings with it the question of date. It is in itself but a small piece of evidence in favour of Cambridge rather than Horton: fortified by the discovery that the poems are derived from a university exercise and that they fit a university audience, it becomes a powerful indication that Milton wrote them while still at College. I think it is legitimate to make a close guess at their date. In style they belong to what I have called elsewhere the poems of Milton's early maturity: those less ambitious poems, beginning with the *Song on May Morning*, written after the ambitious failure of *The*

Passion. *The Passion* dates probably in Lent, 1630. Milton left Cambridge in the summer of 1632. Some date between these two must be sought. In April, 1631, the Marchioness of Winchester died, and Milton celebrated her death in octosyllabics. It is highly probable that he continued his essay in that metre with *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. They are much less indebted to contemporary literature than the *Epitaph*, which suggests Jonson and Browne. But Milton had already shown originality in the *Nativity Ode*; there was nothing to prevent a swift maturing after his initial experiment. The *Seventh Prolusion*, already quoted to prove what dominated Milton's mind at Horton, was almost certainly written in his last year at Cambridge. In it he speaks of the studious retirement which had been interrupted, and in the following passage probably refers to a country holiday in the Long Vacation of 1631:

> I can myself call to witness the woods and rivers and the beloved village elms, under whose shade I enjoyed such sweet intercourse with the Muses, as I still remember with delight. There I too, amid rural scenes and woodland solitudes, felt that I had enjoyed a season of growth in a life of seclusion.

It is very likely that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* reflect these woods and rivers and trees and that they are the fruit of that happy season of growth. In brief, they belong to the summer of 1631.

Most readers of Milton will find the above conclusion extremely distasteful; I certainly did myself. To dissociate things so closely and so long linked as *L'Allegro* and Horton is unpleasant, but, the break once made, it should be possible to appreciate the poem more justly, and, by the removal of an impediment, to understand better what Milton was doing at Horton.

A last observation on Milton's addressing his poems to a university audience. That audience mattered much more to him as a poet than has ever been supposed. We shall have to accustom ourselves to associating his poems from *Elegia Prima* (1626) to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (1631), his *Prolusions*, and his university audience very closely one with another. Such early Latin poems as the elegies on the Esquire Bedell, the Bishop of Ely, and the Vice-Chancellor are obvious instances of such an association. Had he not been ambitious of impressing his fellows as a poet, Milton would never have inserted his *Lines at a Vacation Exercise* in the comic entertainment he was chosen to give before the entire University. The *Second Prolusion*, on the music of the spheres, imitates or is imitated by a passage in the *Nativity Ode*. The lines

Naturam non pati Senium were written for one of the dons for public recitation. I have no doubt that any one who troubled to compare the *Prolusions* with Milton's contemporary poems in detail would find many unnoticed connexions. I fancy that the request to write *Lycidas* sent to Milton from Cambridge five years after he went down was due, not to *Arcades* and *Comus*, but to his high reputation as a writer of elegies and other occasional verse while at College. Milton's 'fit audience though few' was a *pis aller*: he wanted as wide a fame as he could get; and at College he seems to have succeeded pretty well. Only, he would never compromise his integrity at any price; fame was never allowed to come first. Milton succeeded in being ambitious without the corruption that often infects ambition.

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ROBERT BRIDGES

AND

THE TESTAMENT OF BEAUTY

BY

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ROBERT BRIDGES AND *THE TESTAMENT OF BEAUTY*[1]

THERE must be many here with a better right to speak of Dr. Bridges as a man; but, like many Oxonians, I had the honour of a friendly acquaintance with him during his last two years; and more than once found him, on his height above Oxford —whose towers are to be seen far below through his favourite rift in the trees—pacing on his lawn, cordial to the stranger, ready to question, and also ready to talk, not least about his own craft. He liked to discourse on the niceties of metre and on his own practice and experiments. I never heard him read, but believe that he did so in a style that matched with his presence, so noble and magnificently crowned. It must have pleased him that unprofessional persons, innocent of metrical theory, found they could read the *Testament of Beauty* aloud—up to a point—with little effort and merely by following the natural rhythm. But I leave these few, prized reminiscences; nor will I trouble you with a technical discourse on prosody. The measure of the *Testament* already appears in Bridges' previous volumes of 1920 and 1925; it is there, he says, 'in the writer's latest manner, and still peculiar to himself'. It seems to grow out of Milton's usage in *Samson Agonistes*, especially his freer usage in the choruses; and the 'loose alexandrines' are based, we hear, 'on the secure bedrock of Milton's prosody'. Of this, as we know, Bridges had long before published his classic analysis. Only, of course, the base of the new measure is not ten syllables but twelve. It is used not only in the *Testament* but in the earlier *College Garden* and *Poor Poll*; as well as in *Come si quando*, where the high metaphysical style is already clearly developed. The exact formula of the verse, and the principles of its modulation, can be disputed; but one view is clearly set forth in Mr. Nowell Smith's valued book, for which we are all grateful, of *Notes* on the poem. A slightly different one is offered by an instructive reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 20 August 1931. My own reading of the rhythm must be gathered from any quotations that I may make, and I come at once to the subject-matter.

The term *Testament* signifies, first of all, the bequest and message of Beauty herself to the world; and also, that conception of Beauty which is the peculiar bequest of the poet. These two meanings,

[1] Presidential address, delivered 10 June 1932 (revised). The extracts from the *Testament of Beauty* are printed with the kind permission of the Clarendon Press.

however, soon coalesce, all the more that the poem aims at, and often though not always attains, the realization of beauty, both outward and spiritual, in words; and I shall quote from the passages that do this most conspicuously, rather than from the harder and more rugged ones. Those, however, have their indispensable place, not only in the argument but in the poetic effect, like the philosophical or theological parts of Lucretius, of *Paradise Lost*, and of the *Prelude*. The critical question, it will appear, is when and how far these harder passages can be considered poetry; for there is no doubt about the others.

Beauty, as presented to the senses and the mind, is the natural theme of all poets, and also is, or should be, a main property of their form and expression. I say main, for it is not always the first word that we use; either, at one extreme, for the grandeur of *Samson Agonistes*, or, at the other, for such charm or elegance as belongs to a master, like Austin Dobson, of social verse. It is least of all natural to speak first of 'beauty', except in some transferred sense, when the effect, as in some great tragic speeches or impassioned lyrics, depends on discords, be they in the sound or in the sentiment. Still, beauty *is* a most frequent topic of poetry, and, when the work is good, is the most constant quality of its sound and language. As to the sensuous material, it is clearly, if considered objectively, the common ground and treasure of all poets and painters, and indeed of all men. Each artist dips into the same ocean of sights and sounds and odours, and holds up his scoopful in a different cup, of gold or crystal or commoner ware. The senses of each react in a different way, and the expression differs every time; still, they are all drawing upon the same world. But when they come to *think* about beauty, and of how it bears on happiness and behaviour, and of what is the relation of truth and goodness to the beauty of things seen and unseen, then they diverge indeed, and often seem to be speaking of different, even of contradictory, things. To Marlowe beauty is the face of Helen, or again the last touch, for ever unattainable by the artist. To Spenser, when it comes in human shape, it is no mixture of material hues and forms but the expression of a heavenly something which only intelligence, or rather intellectual vision, can apprehend. Shakespeare describes his friend as 'truth in beauty dyed'; to Keats, or perhaps to the spirit of the Grecian Urn (for this is a question debated), the two seem to be identical. Again, towards the end of the last century the very word fell into a certain disrepute; it became associated with a kind of cant, as if it were something only for the elect, not to be touched by the

vulgar. The vulgar retorted on the 'aesthetic' view in their own way, with a rude but telling humour. All this is a thing of the past; but one virtue of Robert Bridges is to have redeemed the word both from the priggish handling of it, and from the derision that followed. For him it is simply one of the holy terms of the language, like goodness or faith; it had been too often profaned, for him to profane it.

Along with Spenser, he is the chief English poet who has girded himself to reason out the question, but he is far more thoroughgoing than Spenser, who does little but expound—it is true with wonderful ease and melody—a number of theories, Platonic and other, and often hardly congruous, that were in the air at the time. Bridges tries to show the place of Beauty in the whole economy of thought: how it is to figure in our religion; by what steps the highest conceptions of it have grown up; and at what points in the course of 'emergent evolution' (the term occurs in the poem) the sense of beauty has been markedly quickened in mankind. He thinks of a driving force that presses for ever upward through the atom, through the organism, and then through all human experience, sensuous, aesthetic, rational, and spiritual. In this process beauty becomes, ever more and more consciously, *valued*, as well as perceived and expressed. To the poet, at any rate, it is a central fact; it is, to begin with,

> our daily bread of pleasur; enough that thus I deem
> of Beauty among Goddes best gifts, and even above
> the pleasur of virtue accord it honour of men.

But this is only half the truth; in the end, beauty is a conception vital both to ethics and to theology.

The argument is difficult, the poem full of excursions and backwaters; but it moves, in general, forward from a vindication and welcome of the messages of sense to the interpretation of these by the soul and reason. The *Testament* is thus a full confession, with posterity for the legatee. It is also, at least in English, a new *species* of poem. It does not, save by implication and on the way, set out, like the *Prelude*, to relate 'the growth of a poet's mind'. The topic, as I said, is the historical growth of an idea, and the place of that idea in the final outlook of the writer. It is the last fruit of a life given to art—musical as well as poetic art—and to philosophic thought. Bridges lived just long enough to receive the salute of the English-reading world to his 'testament'. This, no doubt, it is too soon to judge in set form; we, or rather our heirs, must stand away from it after a lapse of time, in order to see so intricate a fabric in true perspective. Nor can I attempt any real

summary of the argument, here and now. Let me simply try to note one or two of the successive meanings, in the poem, of the keyword beauty, and to disengage them from the mass of enveloping matter; and then to add a word upon the *Testament* as a work of art.

Two passages, one at the beginning and one near the close, explain the inception of the work. In the overture the poet finds himself, like Wordsworth, remembering the sensations of childhood. Though he is near fourscore, they are keener to him than ever; *he* has not, like Wordsworth, to lament their loss:

> 'Twas late in my long journey, when I had clomb to where
> the path was narrowing and the company few,
> a glow of childlike wonder enthral'd me, as if my sense
> had come to a new birth purified . . .

He is like a man upon a hill-top looking down on the plain, now so far off, 'so by beauty estranged', as to be no longer familiar. To the old man—if, indeed, he be Robert Bridges—much of his past becomes as it were both some one else's and his own, far off yet still distinct; and again, though distinct, wrapt in a kind of glory and with the harsh edges softened. Bridges remembers one great 'highday in June', when he had come on an old flowery garden; and he could have lain there 'ever indolently undisturb'd', watching the flowers,

> waving in gay display their gold-heads to the sun,
> each telling of its own inconscient happiness,
> each type a faultless essence of God's will, such gems
> as magic master-minds in painting or music
> threw aside once for man's regard or disregard;
> things supreme in themselves, eternal, unnumber'd
> in the unexplored necessities of life and Love.

The other passage, describing the last moments of a glorious evening, presents Beauty as the consoler:

> 'Twas at sunset that I, fleeing to hide my soul
> in refuge of beauty from a mortal distress,
> walk'd alone with the Muse in her garden of thought.

The mortal distress, it is understood, was the death of the poet's daughter. He discourses with his dreams, that flit about him like bats; and one of them, coming as it were within a dream, reveals to him that

> Verily by Beauty it is that we come at WISDOM;
> yet not by Reason at Beauty.

The 'wisdom' is 'divine wisdom'; and much of the poem has been concerned with the special, the radical problem: How adjust the claims of Reason, the discursive intelligence, itself a slow product of evolution and all but our highest faculty, with the claims of *aesthesis*? What are their respective parts in the ultimate vision of the highest truth? By *aesthesis* is meant the sense-perception which in course of time has acquired the feeling for, and conception of, the beautiful. The general answer is that Reason, fly as high as she will, must depend at last upon these boons of the sense; and that her function is not to supersede either them or the revelations to which they lead, but to make them clearer to us, and more spiritual, and to correct any aberrations. It has, in technical language, a regulative not a constitutive function.

The historical stages of growth in the apprehension of beauty are, broadly speaking, four:

1. It is, in its fullness at any rate, a sense peculiar to man—his 'generic mark'. In the presence of nature, he and he alone can respond with *all* his senses: to the message of cloud and storm, of the music of birds and of Beethoven, and also—a point over which philosophers pass more lightly—even of odours. Of these, too, there are 'a thousand angelic species', each, like the jasmine, with its 'unique spice of perfumery'. So, too, with the pleasures of taste. In one curious and splendid passage the poet seems to be carried away, and then to return upon himself in a burst of moral satire. His praise of wine is as magnificent, I judge, as can be found anywhere in verse. To the eye wine speaks like a jewel, to the nostrils like a flower, to the mind like a rare violin, a Stradivarius of perfect tone; in the fancy it breeds 'unfeatured hopes and loves and dim desires'. Yes, but all this is dramatic; it is the point of view, so we learn (with some scepticism), not of the poet but of the 'voluptuary' who is making out his case: a futile case, for, we suddenly hear,

> In such fine artistry of his putrefying pleasure
> he indulgeth richly his time until the sad day come
> when he retireth with stomach Emeritus
> to ruminate the best devour'd moments of life.

But this sally hardly interrupts the general celebration of the poetry of the senses, of the beauty that strikes through all their channels. The ascetic and mystic may scorn such things, yet he too may be moved to do them honour. St. Francis, in sickness and despond, made his hymn in praise of all the elements, of 'my sister, Mother Earth' with her fruits and flowers: a '*Benciti* to be sung by his bed'. This whole-hearted reception of the beauty and

pleasure that arrive through sense is, plainly enough, anti-puritan; there is no rag of puritanism about it. But, what is equally to be noted, it is no less remote from the temper of the epicure, or of the intellectual Cyrenaic who discovers the chief good in single moments of pleasure, be that pleasure physical or aesthetic. A version of *that* cult, as men of my generation know, gained in late Victorian times a passing and not too healthy vogue; partly, I think, through a misunderstanding of certain utterances of a great critic, Walter Pater. 'Simply for those moments' sake' became a kind of catchword. In any case, the beauty-worship of Bridges is totally different. With him, the emphasis is not upon the *ego* at all and on the satisfaction that it can squeeze out of experience; but upon the source and virtue to the *ego* of that experience; on the face of nature herself, and on the open-air life of man, and on history.

2. The second stage, or as the philosophers say 'moment', is seen in the process of *thinking* about, and of seeking to express, all these gifts of sense; and this the poet seeks to trace in the human record. For here, we find that both the sense of beauty and the desire to record it are manifested very late. Perhaps the poet forgets the lovely and now famous head of the Egyptian queen when he lays it down that the monuments of Egypt and Asia are 'wonderfine' rather than beautiful. He holds that it was in Greece, by the grace of Athena, that art first triumphed:

> By such happy influence of their chosen goddess
> the mind of Hellas blossom'd with a wondrous flow'r,
> flaming in summer season, and in its autumn fall
> ripening an everlasting fruit, that in dying
> scatter'd its pregnant seeds into all the winds of heav'n:
> nor ever again hath like bloom appear'd among men.

Yet, even here, one 'voice in Apollo's choir' was wanting to the 'full compass of song'. For the law is one of progress; new types, or dynasties, of beauty arise, though not without many blank periods and backslidings. The conception is not unlike that in Keats's *Hyperion*, a poem on which Bridges has left what is still the best piece of criticism. 'So on our heels a fresh perfection treads' says Keats's Oceanus in a key-passage. There is a reach, our poet thinks, even beyond the *Iliad*; nothing, however, has 'disthroned'

> bearded Homer's great epic of war;
> altho' thatt siege of Troy was in the beginning
> wrath and concupiscence, and in the end thereof
> tragedy was so tearful that no mind can approve,
> nor any gentle heart take comfort in the event.

Still, time and the Muse have made his story more beautiful than painful. And yet the 'philosophical concinnity of Greece' was not the last word. After many days came Romance, and therewith a deeper conception of Love, deepening that of Beauty. A splendid eulogy follows of the troubadours, who sang of the joys of life and resisted all chilling counter-forces, ecclesiastical or other. But the conception of Dante was profounder still, when he 'saw the face of a fair Florentine damsel as WISDOM UNCREATE', and 'lived thereafter in love', and embodied his idea in great poetry. The beauty of infancy and childhood, besides, was first disclosed by the Catholic painters; and the figure of Mary, *mater fons amoris*, sank into the mind of the West. The whole of this argument leads up to what may be called

3. The third stage, or moment, of the idea of beauty. It leads, that is, to the exaltation of love, in the form of Christian monogamy, as the ideal bond. The third book, on 'Breed'—a term that includes not only sex but all impulses rooted in the animal organism —is here our chief document. (I have, for clearness, not followed the difficult division and titles of the four books.) The love-lyrics of Bridges have long since taken their place in all memories and in the anthologies; now, in his latter years, with the keenness of memory which keeps him young, he watches love and reflects upon it:

> Beauty, the eternal Spouse of the Wisdom of God
> and Angel of his Presence thru' all creation,
> fashioning her new love-realm in the mind of man,
> attempteth every mortal child with influences
> of her divine supremacy . . . ev'n as in a plant
> when the sap mounteth secretly and its wintry stalk
> breaketh out in the prolific miracle of Spring.

The child prefers lovely things to imitate until his eyes are darkened by blundering teachers; and when he grows older,

> See then the boy in first encounter with beauty,
> his nativ wonder awaken'd by the motion of love;
> as when live air, breathing upon a smother'd fire,
> shooteth the smouldering core with tiny flames—so he
> kindleth at heart with eternal expectancies,
> and the dream within him looketh out at his eyes.

4. There can be no cleaner view of the matter; and it follows, naturally, that the whole antinomian conception of 'free love' is foreign to this poet and is dismissed by him as hardly worth his contempt. In these matters he is in the conservative camp, and we are not to look for any sympathy with, or understanding of, the

outlaw view. More and more, as the poem goes on, closing with the book entitled 'Ethic', the Christian terms become distinct; although, certainly, no special church or accepted theology is commended; and, in the last, or fourth, stage of all, the conception of Beauty, like that of Reason, melts into that of Wisdom, itself regarded as 'divine'. Wisdom now covers the whole fruit of experience, sensuous, emotional, aesthetic, intellectual, and religious. It is a pity that the poem closes with a highly scholastic, if exalted, summary of the writer's creed, where terms like 'self and not-self' become identified, and all differences are at last merged in 'one ETERNAL, in the love of Beauty and in the selfhood of Love'. A clearer key to the argument may be found in another, now often quoted, passage:

> *What is Beauty? saith my sufferings then.*—I answer
> the lover and poet in my loose alexandrines:
> Beauty is the highest of all these occult influences,
> the quality of appearances that thru' the sense
> wakeneth spiritual emotion in the mind of man:
> And Art, as it createth new forms of beauty,
> awakeneth new ideas that advance the spirit
> in the life of Reason to the wisdom of God.

It is something like the faith of Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky's story, that 'the world will be saved by beauty'.

Readers of the *Testament* will know that I have dropped out many a refinement in the text. Still, we can fairly trace these four main chapters in the story of the racial consciousness of beauty in its upward advance; and, to some extent, the individual is thought of as repeating the experience of the race. They are, to resume, first, the delighted perception and warranted acceptance of the beauty in nature; next, the double impulse to reflect upon it, and to render it in one or other art; next, or rather concurrently, the spiritualizing of the sense of beauty, in connexion with the highest sort of love; and lastly, the merging of all these phases, and also of the deliverance of Reason, in the vision of divine wisdom.

We are led to ask at once: From what point of view does the poet face the seamy side of the story: the general mystery of ugliness in the moral world; the evil of the misuse of the senses; and, in history, all the retarding elements of brutality, ignorance, and fanaticism? The simplest answer is that these things are not his main subject; he is showing the evolution of an idea which *has* after all sometimes triumphed, both in life and art, in spite of countless obstacles and of arrests that may at any time be repeated. But such an answer is too simple; and Bridges gives a new turn to the usual

retort of the religious, that we are to acquiesce in a riddle which is beyond our reason. Do not, he says, ask *why* is anything; only ask *what* is; study the phenomena, in so far as they are revealed. Your reason itself is but a fraction of the universal mind, and the part cannot sit in judgement on the whole. We are here to examine what is knowable; and, in the poet's view, as his conclusion shows, we *can* truly know a great deal about our ideals, and about the mental destiny towards which we are called upon to work.

Moreover, as many a passage shows, Bridges is far from any sort of cheap or eye-shutting optimism. There is plenty of vehement satire, and much scornful reprobation of the ill things that hinder the progress of the soul. The passages on Sappho, and on the professors of Hedonism, will come to mind. Bridges, perhaps, is at his raciest and fiercest when he turns aside to denounce every sort of communism, socialism, and 'equalitarian' theory. He does not argue; he was not, I think, a man to argue with. But whatever their relevance, we owe some of the most splendid things in his poem to this opinion or prejudice. One is the picture of the beehive, which is presented, in its futile aimless round, as a type of a communistic society. Another, yet more elaborate, is suggested, we are told by Mr. Nowell Smith, 'by the recent finds of Dr. Woolley and his colleagues in Mesopotamia'; and, as he aptly says, 'it is not clear what particular facts of history are supposed to give the socialist a shock'. The digger had found city under city, 'undremt of in archeology'; and at last, a king's tomb full of treasures, vases, seals, and instruments of music, all ready for his use in the life beyond; and, amidst the chariots and masks and silver heads of beasts, 'one rare master-work', namely 'thatt little native donkey, his mascot on the pole'. But also there lay beside him the skeletons of the grooms and women of the harem who were sacrificed to attend him on his journey.

The conception of beauty set forth in this poem does not fit very clearly into the long history of philosophical speculation on the subject. We hear little or nothing of the old questions whether the aesthetic perception is defined by being disinterested, because it is free from personal desire; or whether it is the one escape from the universal 'will to live', being purely contemplative and impersonal, and therefore never disappointed. This last tenet, indeed, Bridges may be said to answer indirectly; for desire and will, in his eyes, are not evils from which we should try to escape, but forces that are indispensable to the human spirit in its upward effort. Nor is he any man's disciple. True, he often draws

upon Plato, the fountain-head of aesthetic theory; but it is, more than once, to contradict Plato. He will have none of the Ideas, which he calls an 'absurdity of indefinable forms'; and he insists that the two steeds, appetite and passion, in the chariot of the *Phaedrus* are not one of them evil and one good; both are good, or conditions of good, springing out of the, at first blind, impulse of life itself. The *Testament*, though it is less the fruit of methodic thought or reading than of a creed rooted in personal experience, is none the less, both for the moralist and the psychologist, a contribution to thought. I see that the lines 'Beauty is the highest of all these occult influences' form a kind of peroration to Mr. E. F. Carritt's valuable collection of texts, *Philosophies of Beauty from Socrates to Robert Bridges*. It is, as I said, a text not easy to connect with the rest of the story. As for beauty being the 'highest' of the influences in question; higher even than goodness which is the matter of ethics, and than truth, the object of science and philosophy—well, that is the natural creed of a poet and artist, to whom goodness and truth come charged at every point with the messages of beauty, and who, as we saw, finally absorbs them all in the conception—not in itself exactly a philosophical one—of Wisdom. When he exalts Beauty, in this sense, above everything else, we think, perhaps fancifully, of Milton's peculiar cast of trinitarian theology, and of the position held therein by the senior member. It would be vain, I think, to look in Bridges' poem for any such rigid background of system, such as Milton has furnished for his own. Indeed, it is high time for me to touch on the *Testament of Beauty* simply as a poem, and to ask—though here again the answer must wait for time, and I only throw out suggestions—how far it is a success.

Apart from theory and superstructure, its true motto is found in some lines printed a few years earlier, in the poem called *Tapestry*. Here Bridges speaks of the world as

> the decorated room wherein my spirit hath dwelt
> from infancy a nursling of great Nature's beauty
> which keepeth fresh my wonder as when I was a child.

For some forty years we had all known that his muse was fostered in this fashion. His nature-poems, chiefly lyrical, were his best-remembered work; and they have found their place, along with some of the elegies and odes, in all the treasuries. His genius seemed to be lyrical, and also meditative, rather than strictly speaking speculative. It was often too delicate, and at first sight apparently too *pale*, for the larger public, who ask above all to be

hit in the midriff. But the ignorant, when they come upon perfect and studious finish, are apt to impute such virtues to a want of passion. We need not spend time on that imputation. But this I think is true, that Bridges, a master of many forms, had never, until he developed the style and measure used in the *Testament*, found a form that left him perfect freedom of expression: one that would give voice to all the moods, passions, whims, dreams, exaltations, prejudices, memories, of the natural man. His *Testament* is in the tone of talk; it has more of the movement of talk, of talk falling into tune, than we find even in his lyric; more, certainly, than we find in his admirable, but comparatively orderly, blank verse. Of the actual metre, the 'loose alexandrines', I have said something already; and in the language itself, in its range of pitch, there is no less variety. The start is often, deliberately, colloquial; and then the style rises, by a slow succession of tones, to something like grandeur. We think, for instance, of the satiric scene of the English garden-party ('Who hath not known this pictur?—on a hot afternoon . . .'), given by some 'vext politician', with its tables and tennis-nets; and in the midst there is a classic statue standing there 'in true ideal nakedness', gazing on the idlers who 'blurt perchance A shamefast shallow tribute to its beauteous presence'. But this is a long epic simile; and a simile for what? For the true, ideal, soldier, the Happy Warrior, as he appears in the 'common concourse of men':

> mute witness and martyr of spiritual faith, a man
> ready at will to render his life to keep his soul.

There are many such descriptions that turn out to be little allegories, ending in some sharp point. Such are the pictures of the bee-community, or of the Assyrian diggings, alluded to before; and these come, as it were, midway between the passages of pure poetry, on flowers and odours and sunsets and landscapes, and those in the more abstract and technical manner. Of the former kind, praise is needless; it has only to be said that there is a more impetuous movement and a more crowded wealth of colour than in the author's purely lyrical verse. Only a poet who had already mastered classic form and its discipline could thus afford to let himself go and to spill his treasure without risk of confusion.

The difficulty of a philosophic poet, as we know, is how to get over the stony ground. We think of the expository and theological parts of *Paradise Lost*, or in Lucretius. They are essential, they contain the reason for the existence of the poem. But if they are to be intelligible, they must do, in great measure, the work of

philosophic prose; and yet they must remain poetry. We may indeed say that such prose, in the hands of Plato or Berkeley, has itself much of the quality of poetry; and may ask, Why should not the poet, in his turn, work in the field of the philosopher? But the fallacy is plain; for the prose writer, like Berkeley, is for ever moving *upwards*, in respect of his style, and may go as high as he can; while the poet, when reasoning on abstractions, is ever moving downwards, towards the danger-point of the dry and scholastic. Every reader of Milton or the *De Rerum Natura* feels this check; and in the *Testament* the problem is the same. Dante, if any one, has solved it, in certain parts of the *Paradiso*, through a sheer mastery of form; one condition of which, doubtless, is the rigid precision of the system that is behind. For the same reason, many a discourse of Lucretius on atoms and the void gives a poetic pleasure. And there are wonderful oases—it is hard to say more—in the doctrinal speeches of Milton's God the Father. As to the *Testament*, a distinction may be suggested, which is useful also in reading Wordsworth's *Prelude*. It is simply this, that where the reasoning is rooted in some personal experience, and is so coloured and presented, it is more likely to be poetry than when it comes as bare impersonal argument. For this touch of nature, we can put up with a few technicalities and hard words. There is a sprinkling of them in the *Testament*, and doubtless they choke the verse. Only the loose alexandrines would admit terms like 'supersensuous sublimation', 'individuality', and 'euristic'. But they do not bulk large in the forty-three hundred and more lines of the poem. When all is said, Bridges has made a *new* style for English philosophic verse, and has often succeeded with it splendidly; more often, doubtless, on what may be called the high plateaux, than on the bleaker summits; and, in particular, in the ethical parts of the argument. Such is the finding of Reason upon the question of war:

> And of War she would say: it ranketh with those things
> that are like unto virtue, but not virtue itself;
> rather, in the conscience of spiritual beauty, a vice
> that needeth expert horsemanship to curb . . .

The general style of the *Testament*, with its naturalness as of talk, qualified by that continual slight strangeness which lifts it into poetry; with the freedom which the new measure allows and indeed compels; and with its invariable, unstudied, nobility of accent, surely deserves all the honours. It lends itself, for one thing, to long-drawn-out and intricate harmonies, some of which it is not too much to call Miltonic. I will end with one more

example, which carries our mind back again to the old poet in his midland retreat, listening among his trees on a spring morning. He is saying, once more, that Reason has her strictly appointed place:

> Nor without alliance of the animal senses
> hath she any miracle: Lov'st thou in the blithe hour
> of April dawns—nay marvelest thou not—to hear
> the ravishing music that the small birdës make
> in garden or woodland, rapturously heralding
> the break of day; when the first lark on high hath warn'd
> the vigilant robin already of the sun's approach,
> and he on slender pipe calleth the nesting tribes
> to awake and fill and thrill their myriad-warbling throats
> praising life's God, untill the blisful revel grow
> in wild profusion unfeign'd to such a hymn as man
> hath never in temple or grove pour'd to the Lord of heav'n?

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WILLIAM SHENSTONE
AND HIS FRIENDS

BY

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WILLIAM SHENSTONE AND HIS FRIENDS

IN the leisured days of the mid-eighteenth century in the heart of Warwickshire might conceivably have been found gathered at the house of one of them, a society of friends, the Warwickshire Coterie, as they have aptly been named by the late Dean Hutton. The centre of the group was William Shenstone, the poet and landscape-gardener, who by his art had made famous 'The Leasowes', his property at Halesowen, some half-dozen miles to the west of Birmingham, and who by the purity of his taste in literature hoped to figure as a leader among those whom he considered the most refined of his generation.

The literary patroness of the group was Henrietta Knight, Lady Luxborough, half-sister of Lord Bolingbroke, and daughter-in-law of the notorious cashier of the South Sea Company, who was living in retirement at Barrels, near Henley-in-Arden, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot'. We hear on the doubtful authority of Horace Walpole that this retirement was due to her own misdemeanour. William Somervile, author of *The Chase*, whom Shenstone loved 'for nothing so much as his flocci-nauci-nihili-pili-fication of money', was a third member of the group, and lived at Edstone on the road from Henley-in-Arden to Stratford. Yet another member was the Rev. Richard Jago, the poet of *Edge Hill* and *The Blackbirds*. After holding a cure at Harbury, near Radway Grange, Edgehill, the home of Sanderson Miller, he settled at Snitterfield, to the left of the road to Stratford after passing Edstone. Jago had been at school with Shenstone at Solihull. The Rev. Richard Graves, author of *The Spiritual Quixote*, *Columella*, and other prose tales, besides several volumes of poetry, had known William Shenstone from his early days at College. Anthony Whistler, too, was of the Warwickshire Coterie, and was a poet and a witty, amusing correspondent, who lived at Whitchurch, Oxfordshire, in a very small box ('a beau in a band-box' Shenstone called him), and lacked the classical scholarship which distinguished Shenstone and Graves, so that he could only enjoy the Classics in translation.

All these names are but little known to fame, but Shenstone, we see from his letters, was certainly acquainted with most of the great men of his day. George Lyttelton lived at Hagley Hall. 'The Lyttelton family', writes Richard Graves, in his *Recollection of some particulars in the life of the late William Shenstone, Esq.*, 'were the most respectable of Mr. Shenstone's nearer neighbours, and were

the first who contributed, by the company they brought thither, to bring the Leasowes into vogue.' 'Mr. William Pitt (afterwards Lord Chatham) was particularly charmed with the Place.' Through the Lytteltons Shenstone came to know Sanderson Miller of Radway, the Grenvilles, James Thomson, 'that right friendly bard . . . that sweet souled bard', Henry Seymour Conway and his wife, Admiral Smith, and most of the fashionable visitors at Hagley Hall.

As the Leasowes rose into vogue, however, it brought many visitors from mere curiosity and soon introduced him to the acquaintance, and made him even courted by the neighbouring gentry and many of the nobility, in the counties adjacent to the Leasowes; amongst whom, besides the Lyttelton family, were the Earls of Stamford and Plymouth, Lord Foley, and Lord Ward; the two former of whom did Mr. Shenstone the honour to consult him in laying out their environs at Enville and Hewel-Grange.

Robert Dodsley, the publisher, was an almost lifelong friend of Shenstone. Every summer he left for a time his business at the Tully's Head, and paid a visit to 'The Leasowes', during which the friends discussed minutely their own literary productions as well as matters of the larger literary world in which Dodsley moved. Shenstone valued his simplicity, humanity, and benevolence, and came to regard affectionately the 'integrity of heart' and 'purity of manners and conversation' remembered in his epitaph.

That epitaph was written by Joseph Spence, the author of *Polymetis* and the *Anecdotes*, to whom Shenstone was introduced by Dodsley, and a friendship founded on a mutual esteem and a common love of landscape-gardening grew up.

With Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore, Shenstone kept up a long correspondence, largely on literary matters connected with the compilation of *The Reliques*. He was on friendly terms with Mrs. Montagu, Queen of the Blues, with Lady Luxborough's friend, the Duchess of Somerset, and with many more.

All his visitors and friends seemed to come to him as an exponent of the finest taste of the day, whether in things literary, or those connected with the new method of making gardens, or those concerned with the passing whims of the eighteenth-century virtuoso. To one his taste in this direction appealed, to another his taste in that, but all concurred in considering him the very acme of refinement.

Any remarks which are made on the life of Shenstone must, of necessity, be built up on Nash's *History of Worcestershire*, and Graves's *Recollection of some particulars in the life of the late William*

Shenstone, Esq., the former a picturesque fragment, and the latter somewhat unreliable, as having been written some years after the events happened.

Nash, in connexion with his remarks on Halesowen, 1779, gave 'some particulars of the life of William Shenstone Esq., the brightest ornament of this place'. At 'The Leasowes' ('Lezzers', as the folks around Halesowen call it), a name signifying 'a grazing farm', William Shenstone and his brother Joseph were born, according to Nash and according to most accounts of the poet's life. Moreover, Shenstone himself wrote to Graves in June 1742, 'I do not know whether it be from the prejudice of being born at "The Leasowes", or from any real beauty in the situation; but I would wish no other, would some one, by an addition of two hundred pounds a year, put it into my power to exhibit my own designs.' Mr. Havelock Ellis, however, following the information given in the Pembroke College matriculation entry, assigns Wickstone as the birthplace of Shenstone. He matriculated at Pembroke, 25 May 1732. 'Gul. Shenstone, 17, Tho. fil: Wickstone in com. Leicest. Gen. fil.'

According to Nash it was the poet's grandfather William Shenstone of Lapull ('Lapull' or 'Lappall' being one of the divisions of Halesowen) who purchased the farm called 'The Leasowes'. We may learn something of Shenstone's forebears from *The Family of Shenstone the Poet*, by Grazebrook, *Extracts from the Parish Registers of Halesowen, Co. Worcester.*

A study of the same *Family of Shenstone* reveals a very interesting fact, which as far as I know, has passed unremarked hitherto. One of Shenstone's ancestors, John Shenstone of Warley, Salop, and of Cradley, finds a place in the Halesowen registers because two daughters of his, Anne and Mary, were baptized at Halesowen. In a note Grazebrook tells us that 'John Shenstone and Margaret Lea of Halesowen, were married at Belbroughton, Co. Worcester, 30. September 1706. She was sister of William Lea of Halesowen Grange Esq., father of Ferdinando Dudley Lea, Lord Dudley'. Lord Dudley, then, of Halesowen Grange, who was a kind neighbour of Shenstone and is frequently mentioned in letters, was related to the poet.

The following picturesque detail, recorded by Nash, has crept into most Lives of Shenstone, notably into those of Johnson and Anderson.

> From his earliest infancy he was remarkable for his great fondness for reading, so that when any of his family went to different markets or fairs, he constantly importuned them to bring him presents of books;

which, if they returned home later than his usual hour of going to rest, were always taken up to bed to him, and sometimes when they had been forgotten, his Mother had no other means to allure him to sleep, but by wrapping a piece of wood in paper like a book; which he would hug to his pillow, till the morning discovered the deception.

Of his early school-days, under the tutelage of Sarah Lloyd, a picture is given in *The Schoolmistress*, one of the most delightful of his poems. What charming descriptions, reminding us at once of Thomson, one of Shenstone's early admirers, of Goldsmith, and of Cowper, are given of the old schooldame, of the hen and her chicks coming to the door, of the child conning the horn-book, still used in the eighteenth century!

Later Shenstone was a pupil at Solihull Grammar School, where he made the acquaintance of his lifelong friend and correspondent, Richard Jago, son of the Rector of Beaudesert, Henley-in-Arden, and a near neighbour of Lady Luxborough.

Thus wrote Jago in *Edge Hill*,

> Nor can the muse, while she these scenes surveys,
> Forget her Shenstone, in the youthful toil
> Associate; whose bright dawn of genius oft
> Smooth'd my incondite Verse; whose friendly voice,
> Called me from giddy sports to follow him
> Intent on better themes—called me to taste
> The Charms of British song, the pictur'd page
> Admire, or mark his imitative skill:
> Or with him range in solitary shades,
> And scoop rude grottos in the shelving bank.
> Such were the joys that cheered life's early morn!
> Such the strong sympathy of soul, that knit
> Our hearts congenial in sweet amity.

It is interesting to remember that Samuel Johnson applied for the post of usher in this same school.

To this early period, no doubt, belonged Shenstone's first acquaintance with the poet Somervile, who was one of Jago's friends—

> O Beaudesert . . .
> Haunt of my youthful steps! Where I was wont
> To range, chanting my rude notes to the wind,
> While Somervile disdained not to regard,
> With candid ear, and regulate the strain.

Shenstone went up to Pembroke College, Oxford, in 1732, at a time when, according to Nash, 'that little seminary was distinguished for the great number of men of genius and learning

with which it abounded, and who have since reflected such honour on this their original place of education (Rev. Dr. William Adams, Master of Pembroke, Dr. Johnson, Anthony Whistler, Rev. Rich. Graves, Rev. Robert Binnell, Rev. William Hawkins, Sir William Blackstone, George Whitfield (servitor))'. Boswell records that 'being himself a poet, Johnson was peculiarly happy in mentioning how many of the sons of Pembroke were poets; adding, with a smile of sportive triumph, "Sir, we are a nest of singing birds" '.

Many interesting particulars of this period of Shenstone's life are given in Graves's *Recollection*, biographical details communicated in a series of letters, a very popular eighteenth-century medium.

Richard Graves made the acquaintance of Shenstone some few months after the latter's entry as a commoner, and describes interestingly the University Life of the period.

Jago was also at Pembroke College, but wore a servitor's gown, so that Shenstone could only visit him in private, 'it being then deemed a great disparagement for a commoner to appear in public with one of that situation'.

Shenstone seems to have paid periodical visits to Mickleton, in the Cotswolds, the home of Graves, where, when he was about twenty-one, he made the acquaintance of Richard Graves's sister, and brother, Morgan, 'who, being a single man, and lately come with his sister to reside in the country, his house was the rendezvous of most of the young people, of both sexes, in the neighbourhood'.

In the warmth of this friendly atmosphere Shenstone cast off his shyness. Though among strangers, Richard Graves tells us, he was reserved, he was witty and amusing in conversation with his friends. Surely the man who penned the terse phrase of the *pensées*, contained in that volume of his *Works* entitled *Men and Manners*, must have been a brilliant conversationalist. Lady Luxborough, with the partiality of friendship, spoke of his conversation as smoothing the rugged path of life and strewing it with flowers. Yet he was awkward in person and manners, plain, heavy, and somewhat fat. Writing to Miss Graves in 1736 he said: 'I must now break off my letter in as awkward a manner as I take my leave, which is likewise usually most awkward where I have most respect.'

Shenstone had lived little in a home atmosphere, for both his father and mother died when he was young, and we may suppose that, from the Graves family, he learned something of the softer grace of manner, necessary when men and women meet and mingle socially.

As a result of the intercourse with Miss G——, Shenstone fell in love with her. He appears at this period to have been somewhat susceptible, for he later discovered warm feelings for Miss C——, whom he met at Cheltenham, and seems, too, from his poems, to have been at any rate keenly interested in Utrecia Smith, daughter of the Rev. William Smith, curate at Mickleton, and schoolmaster of Richard Graves. The latter was himself in love with Utrecia, and even thought of marrying her. She died young, and an urn, with an inscription, was placed by Graves in Mickleton Church. The story of Graves's final choice is told in *The Spiritual Quixote*, in the History of Mr. Rivers.

Undoubtedly in the intervals of his wooing at Mickleton, Shenstone made his first essays in landscape-gardening. Possibly he planted the avenue of elms which goes up the hill towards Kiftsgate, and is still known by his name. Reminiscences of his and Morgan Graves's joint efforts probably are in *The Spiritual Quixote*.

With Miss G——, Shenstone kept up a correspondence which certainly suggests no love-making and we learn details of brother Dick, who was to have been a doctor, but 'turned Friar' probably after the severe illness of which we read in the letters.

Shenstone finally left the University, but 'obtained no academical honours' nor 'took any degree', having, according to Graves, over-stayed his leave.

Between leaving Oxford and finally settling at 'The Leasowes', he spent his time, apparently, at a variety of places, including London and Bath, for he wished to be considered 'as a man of the world, and endeavouring to elicit that pleasure from gaiety which my reason tells me I shall never find'.

For a while Shenstone boarded with his tenant at 'The Leasowes'. The summer of 1745 he spent with his relations, the Dolmans, at Broom, a village off the Bromsgrove Road, where he was later in the habit of staying the night when he wished to break his journey to Barrels.

From 1745 Shenstone was resident at 'The Leasowes', but he had already tried his hand upon the estate, as landscape-gardener, during the time of his tenant. Now he 'retired', to quote a delightful passage from Graves's *Recollection*, 'to the indolence of Shades and solitude, where an elegant fancy was tempted to riot amidst the flowers of descriptive poetry, rather than toil in the mine of profound learning and abstruse sciences'.

From this time onwards Shenstone was engaged in turning 'The Leasowes' into the most charming of country residences, in

cultivating his friends, whom he was always ready to welcome, though he found it hard to go to visit them, in paying an occasional visit to Barrels, with whose mistress he kept up a prolific correspondence. His days were passed in busying himself over trifles, and in 'the embellishment' of his farm, in the tranquil atmosphere which the delightful name of his country home suggests.

Frequently the poet at 'The Leasowes' was depressed, partly, no doubt, by ill health. He seems to have been a victim of what later in France would have been called 'le mal du siècle'. In fact, he was in his outlook a Romantic before the time of Romanticism. In his letters he constantly writes to the effect that he finds life 'the falsest of fair tales'. The truth was that he reserved to himself the right to grumble at somewhat narrow circumstances, though in reality there was no place to him so lovely as his own home. Of his temperament he writes (B.M. Letters, XIV, to Lady Luxborough) 'I have hitherto sought opportunities of indulging that pleasing melancholy, w^{ch} suits my Temper too well'. Again he writes later, 'Melancholy has its charms for Persons of y^{e} finest Taste . . . douce Melancholie—a little whereof is y^{e} most refined Pleasure we know'. This sweet sadness which found expression in his *Elegies*, and in the urns in his garden, was characteristic of that element in eighteenth-century taste which produced on the one hand the Graveyard School of poets, and on the other the dolorous *Meditations among the Tombs*.

In solitary rambles about his walks, accompanied no doubt by 'the faithful Lucy', the dog who is beside him in Alcock's portrait in the National Portrait Gallery, he seems to have come upon most of the beliefs which used to be ascribed to the Romantic Movement in English Literature. He is a forerunner of a later generation in his experiments with metres, in the romantic tone of his poems, particularly his *Elegies*, and in his letters, and he sounds the note of revolt as a landscape-gardener. His criticism, in his Letters and in his Essays, is far ahead of that of the Augustans. He was filled with the antiquarian spirit, showed an interest in Gothicism, was a keen collector of medals, was interested in *Ossian* and the project for *The Reliques*. He was in the forefront of men who appreciated such things.

With reference to the question of Shenstone's health, the ingenious suggestion of a correspondent of mine, that, like most of his contemporaries, he suffered from too good living, somehow does not fit in with one's idea of him. True his frequent malady seems to have been a 'colic', and he writes with keen appreciation of the turkey which he shared with Lord Dudley, and, sadly, that he must

give up sauces and 'all that relishes', but one does not associate with him such meals, for instance, as the Rev. James Woodforde describes in his *Diary*. His outlook seems to have arisen from a hypochondria, joined with a delicate state of health.

To us now, his days certainly seem to have been filled with a delightful leisure.

'As they ascended the hill,' writes Richard Graves, in *The Spiritual Quixote*, speaking of his hero Wildgoose and Jeremy Tugwell, 'through a shady lane, they observed a gentleman, in his own hair, giving directions to some labourers, who were working beyond the usual hour, in order to finish a receptacle for a cataract of water, a glimpse of which appeared through the trees on the side of the road.' This gentleman, Wildgoose discovered 'to be no other than his old acquaintance the now celebrated Mr. Shenstone, whose place began to be frequented by people of distinction from all parts of England, on account of its natural beauties, which, by the mere force of genius and good taste, Mr. Shenstone had improved and exhibited to so much advantage; and this had discovered to the world his own fine poetical talents and polite learning, which, from his modesty, would otherwise probably have been buried in solitude and obscurity'.

Shenstone was always glad to receive his friends, to go down that same hill, 'through a shady lane', to meet, for instance, Lady Luxborough, or to see them at his gate as they passed, as did Lady Lyttleton on her way to Hagley, or James Thomson, only a short while before his death. He was always ready to entertain a visitor 'with that warmth of benevolence, for which he is distinguished among those that know him'.

Then Mrs. Arnold, the poet's housekeeper, was summoned, and some charming conversation ensued. The references to Mrs. Arnold are among the most attractive features of Shenstone's *Letters*. He wanted every servant he had to be a friend. Nevertheless, experience taught him that 'it is the nature of servitude to discard all generous motives of obedience. . . . There are, however, some exceptions to this rule', and certainly Mrs. Arnold was one of these. Whistler looked upon her as 'an example of the simple force of Moral Beauty'. She was famous with poultry, was a kind nurse, and seems to have understood the poet in all his moods. 'I really believe', he wrote 'to a friend' in 1739, 'that I every day approach nearer and nearer to the capacity and insignificancy of an old woman. Mrs. Arnold has certainly, by her charms, her incantations, and her conversations together, contributed a good deal to this transformation.' She would carry the chicks in to her

master, when he was unable to get out to see them, and tempt him out, when recovering from some indisposition, to see 'the pretty creatures in the barn'.

The delightful letter, written to Jago, 'in the manner of Pamela', has often been quoted.

> Well! and so I sat me down in my room and was reading Pamela—. . . As soon as I had sealed my letter, in comes Mrs. Arnold—'Well, Mrs. Arnold, says I, this Mr. Jago never comes—what can I do? I'm as dull as a beetle for want of company.' 'Sir, says she, the hen——' 'What makes you out of breath? says I, Mrs. Arnold, what 's the matter?' 'Why, Sir, says she, the hen that I set last-sabbath-day-was-three weeks has just hatched, and has brought all her eggs to good.' 'That's brave indeed, says I.' 'Ay, that it is, says she, so be and't please G—d and how that they liven, there'll be a glorious parcel of 'em. Shall I bring 'em up for you to see? says she.' 'No, thank ye, Mrs. Arnold, says I, but aren't ye in some apprehensions from The Kite, Mrs. Arnold?'—'No, Sir, says she, I hope there's no danger; I takes pretty good care of 'em.' 'I don't question you care, says I; for you're seldom without a duck or a chicken about you.'—'Poor pretty creters! says she! look here, Master, this has gotten a speck of black upon her tail.'—'Ay, I thought you weren't without one about you, says I.—I don't think, says I, Mrs. Arnold, but your soul was design'd for a hen originally.' 'Why, and if I had been a hen, says she, I believe I should have done as much for my chickens as yonder great black-and-white hen does, tho' I say't that shou'd not say't, said she.' Aye, that you would thought I. 'Well, but now when Mr. Jago comes, have you got e'er a chicken that's fit to kill?' 'No, says she, I doubt there is ne'er a-one.' 'Well, says I, Mrs. Arnold, you and your chicken may go down; I am going to write a letter.'

Possibly, Joseph Shenstone, William's brother, greeted an unexpected guest, and the bond between the two brothers was immediately apparent. They seem to have been of very similar tastes, and to have lived in brotherly affection. Even those readers of the *Letters* who become a little impatient of the homely detail of most of them, and who, perhaps, are irritated by the epistolary smallness of the somewhat effeminate owner of 'The Leasowes', cannot fail to be struck by the genuine feeling of the letters written about the time of Joseph's death. The words then seem to be wrung from the poet by a deep anguish which must find expression. 'Alas! my dearest friend,' Shenstone writes from 'The Leasowes' to Graves, 14 February 1752, 'I have lost my only brother, and since the fatal close of November, I have never had peace nor respite from agonizing thoughts.' To Lady Luxborough, about the same time, he wrote with equal feeling. He surprises us by

saying that he sought to raise his spirits by liquor among low companions, but finding this 'inebriation' unsuccessful sought other distractions—'toys' from Birmingham, and embellishments to his home.

Dr. Alexander Carlyle, in his autobiography, wrote down what he described as 'certain facts within my knowledge, under the title of *Anecdotes and Characters of the Times*, that may be subservient to a future historian, if not to embellish his page, yet to keep him within the bounds of truth and certainty'. We see in his pages many of the famous figures of the eighteenth century—the Garricks, Lord Bute, Mrs. Montagu. In the course of a tour through England, he came to Birmingham.

> On agreement with John Home we set out for Lord Lyttleton's and were to take The Leasowes, Shenstone's place, on our way. Shenstone's was three or four miles short of Lyttleton's. We called there on our way, and walked over all the grounds which were finely laid out and which it is needless to describe. . . . At the end of a high walk, from whence we saw far into Gloster and Shropshire, I met with what struck me most—that was an emaciated pale young woman, evidently in the last stages of consumption, she had a most interesting appearance, with a little girl of nine or ten years old, who had led her there. Shenstone went up, and stood for some time conversing with her, till we went to the end of the walk and returned: on some of us taking an interest in her appearance, he said she was a very sickly neighbour, to whom he had lent a key to his walks, as she delighted in them, though now not able to use it much. The most beautiful inscription he afterwards wrote to the memory of Maria Dolman put me in mind of this young woman: but if I remember right, she was not the person. It is to me the most elegant and interesting of all Shenstone's works.

The kindness of Shenstone to his poorer neighbours was one of his most attractive characteristics. One of the unpublished letters in the British Museum records another act of benevolence. On the back of one of Dodsley's letters to Shenstone, 28 June 1756, is the pencil draft of a letter from the poet to Mr. Milward, in which the latter is asked to do his best for a certain Mary Rice, who 'has a number of Children, and One whom I would recommend to L^{d} Foley's Hospital'.

Another recipient of Shenstone's kindness was James Woodhouse, 'the cobbler poet', the struggling father of twenty-seven children! Shenstone's attitude in this respect was like that of men of greater influence in the world of literature than he, who were in the habit of extending their patronage to those who aspired to poetical honours. 'Mr. Shenstone never refused to lend him any

book from his elegant library' says the advertisement to Woodhouse's *Poems on Sundry Occasions.*

> The liberty Mr. Shenstone's good nature granted was soon turned into licentiousness; the people destroying the shrubs, picking the flowers, breaking down the hedges, and doing him other damage, produced a prohibition to every one without application to himself or principal servants. This was originally the cause of our poet's being known to Mr. Shenstone, he sending him on that occasion, the first poem in the book: which not only gave him the liberty of passing many leisure hours in those charming walks, but introduced him to Mr. Shenstone himself.

Graves, in his *Recollection*, says, 'I believe his encouragement of the ingenious Woodhouse, chiefly recommended him to that magnificent patroness of indigent merit, Mrs. M–nt–gue, who placed him in a situation, where he had leisure to gratify his taste for literary pursuits.' This passage refutes the suggestion made by Miss A. Hazeltine, in her *Study of Shenstone*, that the lady of quality to whom Woodhouse was introduced was Lady Luxborough.

A wet day found Shenstone enjoying his harpsichord, on which he was no mean performer. Indeed his letters everywhere show a love of music, which, as an eighteenth-century man of taste, he cultivated with care. Like William Mason, he set some store by his accomplishment. To Graves he writes, 23 September 1741, at the time when the former was in danger of losing his sight,

> Though my wishes will not suffer me to believe that your eyes are in the danger you represent, yet, supposing them to be only very weak, I would recommend some musical instrument that is most agreeable to you. I have often looked upon music as my dernier resort, if I should ever discard the world and turn eremite entirely. Consider what other amusement can make an equal impression in old age.

He was a frequent visitor at the Worcester Musical Festival, where he delighted above all to hear Handel's *Messiah*. He was known to his friends as one interested in music, and his harpsichord was borrowed to be sent to Hagley for the new Mrs. Lyttleton, the wife whom George Lyttleton married when the sorrow at his first wife's death, which drew forth *The Monody*, had abated. An unpublished letter to Lady Luxborough tells us, 'I fancy y^e^ new Mrs. Lyttleton plays finely on y^e^ Harpsichord. They borrow mine in order to be ready for her, as soon as she comes down.'

On a day when it was not possible to direct his workmen at their improvements on his estate, he and his brother enjoyed new books indoors, books that Dodsley had sent, or Lady Luxborough had

lent, or that Joseph had bought, for Joseph seems to have been more extravagant in this particular than William. Then, with ideas fresh in his mind, the latter sat down to write to one of his more intimate correspondents, to Lady Luxborough, to Graves, to Whistler, or to Jago, or if the atmosphere were sufficiently tranquil, penned some of the critical comments of *Men and Manners*.

In his literary output, as in his other activities, hurry was entirely alien to him. 'I am well aware', he tells Lady Luxborough in a letter written 13 May 1753, 'y^{t} my Pegasus is one of those dull Horses which will not bear to be hurry'd. Allow him his Time, and he may jogg on safely; but urge him to move faster, and he is sure to break one's neck.' In his desire for perfection of form in prose and verse his taste was that of Pope and his school. The polish which is apparent in *Men and Manners* and in Shenstone's poems is the result of infinite pains, and one imagines long evenings spent, for instance, over the composition of a single letter.

Possibly on a dull day painting called him, and he made some of the 'decorations' which adorned his books when published, or prepared a 'flower book' to be sent as a graceful present to Mrs. Jago, the wife of Richard Jago, and mother of the three daughters who planted the three silver birches in the rectory garden at Snitterfield, hard by the church. The dainty presents of Shenstone to his friends remind one of George Cumberland, that delightful middle-class letter writer, and suggest once more the leisure of the century which allowed people, with pretensions to refinement, time to cultivate such accomplishments as resulted, for instance, in the work of Mrs. Delany.

Or perhaps Shenstone spent a little time in looking over his prints, for no person of taste was without his collection of prints, and the *Letters* show that Shenstone was regarded as having a fine discrimination in the selection of these. Perhaps he rearranged his collection of medals, a hobby which suggests Graves, who, following his father, an antiquary of repute, was an enthusiastic collector. John Scott Hylton, 'a modest young man', of Lepall House, Halesowen, assisted Shenstone to collect many of the trifles so dear to him. He found, he tells us, 'a substantial happiness in an urn, a seal, a snuff-box, an engraving, a bust', and though he took pride in following the world of fashion, in spite of his small income, and consulted Lady Luxborough with regard to Lord Bolingbroke's taste in busts or on the vogue of the moment in some other particular, one can have doubt that he was perfectly genuine in his appreciations of the artistic treasures which it was fitting

that men of refinement should love in the eighteenth century. Like Graves, who grew so fond of the odds and ends collected through a long life that he could bear to part with none of them, Shenstone believed, as we learn from *Men and Manners*, that 'inanimates, toys, utensils, seem to merit a kind of affection from us, when they have been our companions through various vicissitudes. I have often viewed my watch, standish, snuff-box, with this kind of regard, allotting them a degree of friendship, which there are some men, who do not deserve.'

Midst many faithless only faithful found!

His occupation was interrupted, perchance, by the arrival of his trusty servant, Tom, who so often dispatched to Barrels with a letter, and who bore one in return, or by the arrival of a parcel of books from Dodsley, together with a present of 'a hamper, with a Barrel of Oysters and some porter for the Leasowes against Christmas'. When one considers the slow transport of the eighteenth century one becomes a little nervous about the condition of the oysters on arrival.

A more lasting pleasure than the fleeting calls of neighbours was afforded by a visit from Lady Luxborough, one of his most distinguished visitors, Mrs. Davies and Mr. Outing, who came 'with five servants and a set of horses, to stay with me for some time'. 'A coach with a coronet', Shenstone exclaims in a letter to Jago, 'is a pretty kind of phaenomenon at my door—few prettier.' He never quite recovered from his surprise that Lady Luxborough should receive him among her most intimate friends, for she was always to him a 'lady of quality', connected through her brother Bolingbroke with the world of fashion and literature, and she was the first to recognize him as a man whose taste and judgement were to be applauded in matters aesthetic.

During the summer months of 1758 the poet experienced keen delight from a visit of Dodsley and Spence, who passed a week with him on their way to Scotland, 'on a journey of curiosity', whither they would have drawn their host had his affairs permitted. 'I have seen few', wrote Shenstone to Graves, 'whom I liked so much, upon so little acquaintance, as Mr. Spence: extremely polite, friendly, cheerful, and master of an infinite fund of subjects for agreeable conversation.' No doubt much of their conversation was on the subject of current literature and gardening, for Spence had already made his mark with *Polymetis* and Dodsley was preparing to present *Cleone*, and at Byfleet, his Surrey home, Spence was engaged in making a garden in the 'modern

taste', such as Shenstone had already made famous at 'The Leasowes'.

Dodsley seems to have paid an annual summer visit to Shenstone and stayed at 'The Leasowes' for some months when arranging an edition of his *Fables* with John Baskerville, the Birmingham printer, and doubtless Baskerville often came over from Easy Hill, which was but a short distance, to discuss matters with Dodsley and Shenstone. The latter had a warm admiration for Baskerville's work, and thought it 'for type and paper, a perfect curiosity'. The only detail of Baskerville's method which did not find favour with him was the printer's love of a crowded title-page.

Surely, during Dodsley's visits, the friends did more than merely divide time 'into two equal parts, "l'un à dormir, l'autre à ne rien faire".' Together, when Dodsley's gout permitted, no doubt they walked forth, Shenstone clad in the familiar 'plain blue coat and a scarlet waistcoat with a broad gold lace, which he seldom changed either winter or summer', and together they fed the wild ducks and watered the carnations, for Shenstone's country life fascinated Dodsley. But much time too was spent in 'refined conversation'. 'Refined sense is what one is apt to value one's self upon; but really, unless one has a refined soul or two to converse with, it is an inconvenience', wrote Shenstone. When Dodsley came, Shenstone threw off his 'drowsihed and lentor', and was no longer condemned merely to saunter about his grounds, 'take snuff, and read Clarissa', which last occupation threatened to become 'extremely tedious'.

The story revealed by Shenstone's letters of the poet's association with the publisher and playwright is intensely interesting to the literary student, and moreover does much to establish Shenstone's position as a man whose judgement in things literary was accepted with little question by those who knew him.

Dodsley lived in London with his finger on the pulse of the reading public, and, one suspects, often took considerable risks in publishing. He seems to have relied implicitly on the judgement of Shenstone and to have used his pure taste as a touchstone whereby to test the merit of many a book which came from his press. He often took care that Shenstone should have books before they were actually ready for sale. His taste was for Dodsley the quintessence of what was best in mid-eighteenth-century taste, and we must remember that Dodsley, as a hard-headed man of business, always endeavoured to anticipate a popular demand, and tried to print for a public which would read what was printed. In the matter, too, of his own compositions Dodsley appealed to his friend.

The visits of literary friends, moving in a circle less far removed from the centre of things than the Warwickshire Coterie, must indeed have been a great pleasure to one 'stationed among the makers and wearers of hobnails'. Visitors like Bishop Percy, or like Dr. Grainger and Mr. Luard, 'both Persons of Taste, the Dr. a person of much real Learning', stirred the even tenor of the poet's life, and urged him to new activity. Yet he might have written to them as he did to Graves, 'I think within myself I could proceed if you were here; and yet I have reason to believe if you were here, we should only ramble round the groves and chat away the time; and perhaps that, upon the whole, is of full as much importance'.

Dr. Johnson himself contemplated a visit, and letters apparently passed between the poet of 'The Leasowes' and the dictator of Fleet Street. Shenstone would have appreciated a visit from one of whom he wrote to Percy, 'I have a Prejudice (if Prejudice it may be call'd) in favour of all he undertakes, and wish y^{e} world may recompense him for a Degree of Industry seldom connected with so much real Genius.'

Winter gloom was cheered by the visits of John Hylton and Lord Dudley, both near neighbours, the one at Lepall House and the other at Halesowen Grange. On Hylton's arrival the talk was all of snuff-boxes, of the purchase of a 'favourite waistcoat', of the fine silver buckles which Hylton bought in London, of the tobacco-stopper made of Shakespeare's mulberry-tree, which has, as Washington Irving remarked, as wonderful self-multiplying powers as the wood of the true cross. It was characteristic of Shenstone's breadth of interest that he could be all things to all men, for one has no reason to suppose that Hylton was anything other than a very ordinary country gentleman of means, who dabbled in literature as he dabbled in other branches of art, because he was boyish and full of energy, and liked to have plenty of occupation to fill his time. Of his efforts at poetry Shenstone had no opinion, but he was a pleasant friend, and brought news from the world of fashion or trifles of gossip about near neighbours. Apparently Hylton's activities as a virtuoso were not regarded on all occasions quite favourably by his friend, for his zeal as a collector sometimes outran his discretion. This gave rise to the following comment in Shenstone's essay *On Taste*: 'There is a kind of counter-taste, founded on surprize and curiosity; which maintains a sort of rivalship with the true; and may be expressed by the name concetto. Such is the fondness of some persons for a knife-haft made from the royal-oak, or a tobacco-stopper

from a mulberry-tree of Shakespeare's own planting.' When Hylton was away travelling, Shenstone wrote to him of his tenants' activities, of local happenings—of 'Jack-a-Nokes and Tom-a-Stiles of Hales-Owen', or of some trinket which the poet desired his friend to purchase for him. Hylton replied with news from the towns through which he passed, or with a story of Captain Outing, his travelling companion, who blamed him 'for not travelling like an Apostle, as he does, with one Coat, one Shirt, one Pair of Stockings, one Pair of Shoes etc.' His letters, to quote his own words, 'like a Welsh Dish, called a Salma-Gundy, which hungry people may eat, but not digest', endear to us this boyish correspondent.

Lord Dudley was a great friend of both Hylton and Shenstone, and, though without advantages of education, to the latter, Grave stells us, he was ever a welcome guest. 'L^{d} Dudley', wrote Shenstone to Lady Luxborough, on 22 June 1753, 'is expected at the Grange next Tuesday. I long to see him for his Honesty. In such a scoundrell Parish as ours, it really shines.' He supplied Shenstone with franks, helped him to entertain distinguished visitors, such as Lady Luxborough, and was interested in the manifestations of his neighbour's taste, whether shown in the erection of a greenhouse or in the introduction into the neighbourhood of the musical French horn. Always he showed himself a kindly, interested friend, and as such Shenstone, with his wide sympathy, valued him.

Shenstone often complained to his friends of his shallow purse; yet, from his mother's family he inherited an income of £300 a year, which in the eighteenth century was a considerable sum. We remember Goldsmith's parson, who was 'passing rich on forty pounds a year', and Mrs. Cumberland, the mother of George and Richard, was settled in life with a small income, which her son deemed quite sufficient, for he wrote, 'You see, with £13 a year and the House, you will be according to your way of reckoning rich.' In Shenstone's case, however, his income, though a fair one, would not stretch to provide funds for the improvements in his garden and for the purchase of the elegant trifles in which he, as a man of taste, delighted.

Dr. Johnson asserted that 'his house was mean and he did not improve it', and that his extravagancies brought upon him clamours that overpowered the lamb's bleat and the linnet's song. To correct this idea Anderson wrote his *Life*.

Undoubtedly Shenstone, with his poetical temperament, longed for more money, just as he longed for fame, so that he could

indulge his fancy, and grew impatient when he could not realize his ideas in his garden.

> Poet and rich! 'tis solecism extreme.

'Oeconomy, thou good old aunt' was to him a tiresome relation, and he writes of her, only half-seriously, in an 'aldermanly treatise'. 'Patience is the panacea', he exclaims in *Men and Manners*, 'but where does it grow, or who can swallow it?'

'Dwelling in the Castle of Indolence', engaged in the trivial pursuits and trifling recreations of a man of refinement in the mid-eighteenth century, William Shenstone passed his life. He followed the advice he gave to Jago, 'I would have you cultivate your garden; plant flowers, have a bird or two in the hall (they will at least amuse your children); write now and then a song; buy now and then a book; write now and then a letter.' Shenstone died before he was fifty years old. His brother and three of his close friends, Whistler, Somervile, and Lady Luxborough, were already dead; Jago and Graves survived him. News of his death, Dodsley says, was received with inexpressible grief by 'his more intimate friends and the generous concern of those, who, too late acquainted with his merit, were indulging themselves in the pleasing thought of having provided for his future ease and tranquil enjoyment of life'. As a connoisseur his friends had come to rely upon him. Hylton consulted him about his hobbies, his medals, his standish, his snuff-boxes and shoe-buckles, his prints and engravings; Lady Luxborough upheld his taste as a gardener, a literary man and a virtuoso; Dodsley relied on his judgement; Graves and Jago were constantly in communication with him on literary subjects; Bishop Percy appears to have been always ready to accept his choice of those ballads which should find a place in the famous *Reliques*, and the neighbouring Lords followed his lead as an exponent of the new method of landscape-gardening. By the end of his life the 'elegant Mr. Shenstone' had attained a sure position as a leader in matters of taste in his generation. Ever enthusiastic in praise of her friend, Lady Luxborough once wrote to him,

> You give innocent pleasure to yourself and instruction as well as pleasure to others by the amusements you follow. Your pen, your pencil, your taste and your sincere unartful conduct in life (which are the things which make you appear idle) give such an example, as it were to be wished might be more generally followed—few have the capacity, fewer have the honesty to spend their time so usefully as well as unblameably.

This, though written by a partial friend, may serve as a just estimate of Shenstone's successful achievement in the art of living.

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SHAKESPEARE AND TOLSTOY

BY

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SHAKESPEARE AND TOLSTOY[1]

I

THE proper study of Shakespeare's work is only beginning. Appreciation has been granted in full measure; praise has reverberated down the centuries; but understanding has kept no pace with applause. And, indeed, applause has often been misdirected. The splendours of Shakespeare are vast and inexhaustible; but there are some elements in his work which are not, which, by its very nature, cannot be, the fine pieces of realistic exactitude to which his idolaters have raised them. The Shakespearian world does not exactly reflect the appearances of human or natural life. The events in his world are often strange to the point of impossibility. Whoever knew the sun go out? What man has ever acted as did King Lear, what woman as Hermione? Now Shakespeare has been praised to excess for his 'characterization'. The term is vague. But, if we take it in its most usual and popular sense, as photographic verisimilitude to life, depending on clear differentiation of each person in the play or novel, we find 'characterization' not only not the Shakespearian essence, but actually the most penetrable spot to adverse criticism that may be discovered in his technique. Thence two great minds have directed their hostility: Tolstoy and Bridges. Here I shall show that those attacks on Shakespeare, often perfectly justifiable within limits, are yet based on a fundamental misunderstanding of his art; but that such misunderstanding is nevertheless extremely significant and valuable, since it forces our appreciation and interpretations from excessive psychologies of 'character', which run to waste over a wide expanse of theory, into legitimate channels of inquiry into the true substance and solidity of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry. We shall then see, too, that Tolstoy's further objection to Shakespeare's lack of any religious essence in his work is also quite without foundation.

Shakespeare is a great poet. We have, misled by nineteenth-century romantic criticism, regarded him rather as a great novelist. The position is put trenchantly by Professor Barker Fairley while writing of my book *The Wheel of Fire* in *The Canadian Forum*. I

[1] This article is a reply to the Essay 'Shakespeare and the Drama' written by Tolstoy which appeared in *Tolstoy on Art* published by the Oxford University Press in 1926.

quote from his fine statement which has considerably clarified my own views:

> . . . For although I was brought up in the view that Shakespeare was primarily interested in character I never quite believed it, because it never enabled me to read Shakespeare with the deep satisfaction that I have learned to expect from great poetry. Lacking any clue to the universal values which I felt must be discoverable in him I always came away hungry and dissatisfied from my study of him. And it seemed to confirm me in this private suspicion of mine about Shakespeare that all other great poets manage with so few characters.

We shall find a closely similar expression by Tolstoy of his failure to derive satisfaction from Shakespeare equivalent to that he has 'learned to expect' from other poets. Professor Barker Fairley mentions Homer, Dante, and Aeschylus, and observes that if we make Shakespeare's power depend on characterization we align him rather with Tolstoy and Balzac than with them:

> . . . Surely it is for the story-tellers and the recorders to multiply character and for the poets to reach beyond these individual variations into the philosophic invariables.

Again:

> Yet we go on as before, treating Shakespeare as the student of personality, the multiplier of character. Why do we do it? Because we have nothing to put in its place. Finding ourselves incapable of coping with the dark depths that lurk behind the tragedies, unable to see clearly or to move clearly in them, baffled and confused by them, we retreat again into the dramatic daylight and content ourselves with what we can see there. This is what the orthodox view of Shakespeare amounts to; it is a *pis aller*, a second best, a confession of defeat. We may make a virtue of it and talk of the divine inexplicability of Shakespeare, of the all-seeing poet too wise for philosophy, and what not, and all we mean is that when we try to enter the dark cellarage of his mind our little candles blow out and we withdraw in fear and confusion.

That appears to me to be an admirable exposition of the whole matter. We have not understood Shakespeare. And our error has been this: a concentration on 'character' and realistic appearances generally, things which do not constitute Shakespeare's primary glory; and a corresponding and dangerous, indeed a devastating, neglect of Shakespeare's poetic symbolism. Hence our age-long inconscience of those twin pillars which support the architecture of the Shakespearian universe: 'tempests' and 'music'.

II

Now Tolstoy was genuinely pained and perplexed by his inability to appreciate Shakespeare. My quotations will be drawn from the essay 'Shakespeare and the Drama' in the fine volume *Tolstoy on Art* (Oxford), a massive collection of some of the most masculine, incisive, and important criticism that exists; all, whether we agree or disagree, of so rock-like an integrity and simplicity that its effect is invariably tonic and invigorating, and often points us directly, as in this essay on Shakespeare, to facts, before unobserved, yet both obvious, and extremely significant. Tolstoy sincerely tried to like Shakespeare:

> My perplexity was increased by the fact that I have always keenly felt the beauties of poetry in all its forms: why then did Shakespeare's works, recognized by the whole world as works of artistic genius, not only fail to please me, but even seem detestable? (p. 394.)

Tolstoy found Shakespeare's works 'insignificant and simply bad'; they induced in him 'repulsion, weariness, and bewilderment' (p. 394). Nobly he appears to have read, and re-read them, 'several times over' in Russian, English, and German (p. 394). Always with the same result. He is definite in his conclusions that Shakespeare is a poor writer. Shakespeare is 'a man quite devoid of the sense of proportion and taste' (p. 437); his plays are compositions 'having absolutely nothing in common with art or poetry' (p. 439); they are 'works which are beneath criticism, insignificant, empty, and immoral' (p. 447); and again, Shakespeare is an 'insignificant, inartistic, and not only non-moral but plainly immoral writer' (p. 463).

Where a mind like Tolstoy's can so violently oppose the approbation of the centuries there is something curiously wrong. Nor is it merely a question of Tolstoyan prejudice. The late Dr. Bridges, generally acknowledged as a fine poet and critic, reacted to Shakespeare in a precisely similar fashion. I shall quote here and elsewhere from his essay *The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama* (Oxford): an essay approved by modern realistic criticism and thus considered by Mr. Middleton Murry to be one of the finest pieces of Shakespearian criticism of our time. Bridges regarded Shakespeare as a genius prostituting his art to please his public. Hence:

> . . . Shakespeare should not be put into the hands of the young without the warning that the foolish things in his plays were written to please the foolish, the filthy for the filthy, and the brutal for the brutal; and that, if out of veneration for his genius we are led to

admire or even tolerate such things, we may be thereby not conforming ourselves to him, but only degrading ourselves to the level of his audience, and learning contamination from those wretched beings who can never be forgiven their share in preventing the greatest poet and dramatist of the world from being the best artist. (p. 29.)

True, Bridges at every turn admits the supreme power and ability of Shakespeare, and is at pains to find reasons for his 'faults'. He has the advantage, which Tolstoy had not, of receiving the Shakespearian poetry as no foreigner can ever quite receive it. But he is unequivocal in his dislikes:

Exasperation is the word that I should choose to express the state of feeling which the reading of the *Othello* induces in me. . . . (p. 24.)

Elsewhere Bridges complains of Shakespeare's carelessness, disregard of improbabilities in plot-texture, faults of 'characterization', and want of taste. Here are a few of his phrases: 'bad jokes and obscenities' (p. 2), 'extreme badness of passages' (p. 2), 'scenes which offend our feelings' (p. 4), 'disgusting utterance' (p. 5), 'disgusting detail' (p. 7), 'blurr'd outline' (p. 13), and so on. It is all just like Tolstoy, who continually complains of Shakespeare's vulgarity. Tolstoy refers to his perplexity, his search for a resolution of the difficulty. In somewhat the same strain Bridges writes of Shakespearian tragedy that 'the pleasure attending our surprise gratifies us, and our critical faculty is quieted by the reflection that there must be a solution, and that it is natural enough that we should not hit upon it at once' (p. 17). But both were finally sure of themselves. Shakespeare was convicted of numerous faults. No defence was forthcoming; and 'realistic' criticism was loosed on the twentieth century.

It is time to reverse such criticism. First, we must observe its place in the history of Shakespearian study. It is plainly a reaction from the extravagant praise and rhetorical appreciation that so long and so loud sounded throughout the nineteenth century. Tolstoy quotes a passage from Swinburne:

I am not minded to say much of Shakespeare's Arthur. There are one or two figures in the world of his work of which there are no words that would be fit or good to say. Another of these is Cordelia. The place they have in our lives and thoughts is not one for talk. The niche set apart for them to inhabit in our secret hearts is not penetrable by the lights and noises of common day. There are chapels in the cathedral of man's highest art, as in that of his inmost life, not made to be set open to the eyes and feet of the world. Love and Death and Memory keep charge for us in silence of some beloved names. It is the crowning glory of genius, the final miracle and

> transcendent gift of poetry that it can add to the number of these and engrave on the very heart of our remembrance fresh names and memories of its own creation.

Such writing necessarily provokes a reaction. We should observe, too, how the critic here has said nothing whatsoever beyond what might have been understood from his opening sentences. But as the rest of the passage vitiates even those, which asserted that nothing was to be said about Arthur or Cordelia, the total resultant is one of sheer vacancy. This is an extreme instance; but it is typical of a tendency in nineteenth-century commentary. Such 'romantic' critics praised extravagantly, but either ignored the necessity to think out their meanings or, in trying to do so, actually misunderstood themselves. They felt the Shakespearian grandeur; they understood, or thought they understood, the Shakespearian persons; and therefore they often assumed that the Shakespearian grandeur was almost wholly a matter of 'characterization', and realistic description of human life. Tolstoy saw that they were wrong. And Tolstoy's violent attack on Shakespeare is primarily aroused, not by Shakespeare, but by the Shakespearian commentators. He refers to their 'long foggy erudite articles' (p. 458). The critics 'began to search Shakespeare for non-existent beauties, and to extol them' (p. 455): which is often true. The essay continually returns to the extravagant praise lavished on Shakespeare: praise which Tolstoy rightly saw to be either mere froth and sentiment, or definitely wrong. He can even afford Shakespeare himself a little praise:

> If people now wrote of Shakespeare that, for his time, he was a great writer, he managed verse well enough, was a clever actor and a good stage-manager, even if their valuation were inexact and somewhat exaggerated, provided it was moderate, people of the younger generations might remain free from the Shakespearian influence. (p. 462.)

He can admit Shakespeare's 'masterly development of the scenes' (p. 455). But he cannot, and will not, admit Shakespeare's eminence in characterization, in which, if we limit the term to Tolstoy's meaning, he is quite right; nor his eminence as a comprehensive and exact artist in a wide and detailed sense, in which he is, with Bridges, quite wrong. So Tolstoy quotes numerous examples of romantic panegyric. His conclusion is:

> And really the suggestion that Shakespeare's works are great works of genius, presenting the climax both of aesthetic and ethical perfection, has caused and is causing great injury to men. (p. 459.)

Misguided as he may be in his whole contention, Tolstoy is

nevertheless correct in his feeling that the Shakespearian commentary he knew was often quite out of touch with the facts.

These masses of doubtful commentary had, indeed, clearly influenced him. He looked in Shakespeare for the qualities most usually praised and found them non-existent. The actual fact, namely that Shakespeare's idolaters had continually passed over the poet's most important qualities, did not occur to him. It could hardly have done so. Where an English poet, Bridges, was baffled, we could hardly suppose Tolstoy to have succeeded. Both, writing about the same time, and similarly, though independently, reacting from romantic criticism, bring forward precisely the same objections: poor characterization, impossible events, exaggeration, vulgarity. Applying the hackneyed opinions to Shakespeare, they found that these qualities refused to fit: Tolstoy therefore rejects Shakespeare wholesale; Bridges those elements that repel him.

His essay, Tolstoy tells us,

> is the result of repeated and strenuous efforts, extending over many years, to harmonize my views with the opinions about Shakespeare accepted throughout the whole educated Christian world. (p. 393.)

Which shows how closely he was influenced by the commentators. From the commentators, he advanced to Shakespeare, and found therein numerous extraordinary events which the commentators had done nothing to explain. His attack on Shakespeare is thus at root a healthy attempt to break free from the 'hypnotism', as he calls it, of romantic criticism. Lear's division of his kingdom he finds absurd. Gloucester's attempted suicide he finds absurd. He concludes that 'Shakespeare's characters continually do and say what is not merely unnatural to them but quite unnecessary' (p. 437). Now *King Lear* is undoubtedly a strange play. While we expect normal occurrences therein we shall certainly fail to receive its statement. Incongruity is everywhere. Lear's original action is incongruous, as Gloucester clearly and incisively observes; and the sequent action shows a whole world of incongruous events, bizarre, fantastic. At the climax, we have Gloucester's mock-suicide. The pattern of the whole must be grasped before we can understand the significance of the parts. Looking for normal human events, Tolstoy was baffled. We can hardly blame him, directed, as he was, by a century of European commentary that stressed mainly Shakespeare's consummate skill in characterization, and tended to neglect his daring flights of symbolism, his bold strokes of allegory, his amazing power of bodying forth in terms of humanity, beasts, and elements a central dynamic idea

whose ultimate mystery is by these expressions carried over to us but never bound rigidly to any law of 'characterization', 'realism', 'observation', or any other of those elements of art so often taken to be its only purpose and essence. Not that the Shakespearian imagination is purely subjective. Rather it ever fuses the power originating in the poet's soul with the appearances he observes. Fusing thus 'expression' with 'imitation', the poet accomplishes his 'creation': which process, the process of all poets, is always exquisitely balanced and harmonized in Shakespeare. Tolstoy, expecting rather the novelist's skill tending more towards 'observation' and 'imitation', is perplexed by Shakespeare. We may notice in passing that Tolstoy's own aesthetic theory in *What is Art?* concentrates rather on the inwardness of art, the 'feeling' of the artist. His novels strike us, however, primarily by their realism and objectivity. They appear real as life itself, in a sense that Shakespeare's work does not. But, whether in his early practice or later theory, Tolstoy presents ever a rock-like simplicity. And this grand simplicity in his soul is baffled and repelled by the infinite complexities of the Shakespearian art. He could never have liked Shakespeare, because of his intellectualism, his subtlety, and complexity. But without the misguided commentary to which he looked for help he would probably not have hated, and might even, within limits, have admired him.

Thus *Lear* is condemned for being unnatural: 'this unnatural scene' (p. 399), 'the struggle does not result from a natural course of events' (p. 420), 'equally unnatural is the secondary and very similar plot' (p. 420), 'full of unnatural occurrences' (p. 405). 'Unnatural' indeed. The whole play is concerned with this matter of 'nature' and 'unnatural' events. Often as Tolstoy insists on the unnatural occurrences in *Lear*, he does not do so so often, nor so powerfully, as the poet himself. Those repeated emphases I have already discussed in *The Wheel of Fire*. As usual, the 'fault' observed by the critic is essential to the Shakespearian vision.

Similarly, Bridges objects that *Macbeth* presents no clear motive for the protagonist's crime. For which he blames Shakespeare:

> If he had any plain psychological conception, we should expect the drama to reveal it; but his method here is not so much to reveal as to confuse. (p. 14.)

Again:

> Now this veiled confusion of motive is so well managed that it must be recognized as a device intended to escape observation. That the main conception of the play is magnificent is amply proved by the effects obtained; but they are none the less procured by a deception,

> . a liberty of treatment or a 'dishonesty', which is purposely blurred. The naturalness is merely this, that in nature we cannot weigh or know all the motives or springs of action; and therefore we are not shock'd at not being able to understand Macbeth; the difficulty indeed is one main source of our pleasure, and is intended to be so: but this is not nature, in the sense of being susceptible of the same analysis as that by which the assumptions of science would investigate nature. (p. 15.)

This passage calls for two criticisms. First I will speak of Bridges's reference to Shakespeare's 'intentions'.

We should observe here the recurrence of the 'intention' concept: 'intended to escape observation', 'purposely blurr'd', 'and is intended to be so'. This is ever the sign of false criticism, criticism which has forgotten the primary fact of artistic composition, namely, that it derives not from 'consciousness' nor 'unconsciousness' in the usual sense, but rather from a third mode, neither the one nor the other, for which we have no proper word. We may, of course, talk metaphorically of the 'purpose', meaning the thought-direction, of the art-form itself; or the 'purpose' of one part, as contributing this or that to the whole; but never, except in definitely psychological analysis of the poet himself, of the 'intention' or 'purpose' in the poet's mind as distinct from or modifying the thing intended or purposed. Therefore to assert here that such and such an effect is 'intended to escape observation' means nothing relevant whatsoever. It cannot quite mean that such a power to elude observation is the proper and natural purpose of such an effect, since then there could scarcely be any complaint. Rather Bridges means that the poet 'intended' this. And how, indeed, can any one know such a thing? And what difference does it make if we do? In exactly the same way Tolstoy, misled by the usual clichés of Shakespearian commentary, flounders into 'intentions':

> Such is the introduction. Not to speak of the vulgarity of these words of Gloucester, they are also out of place in the mouth of a man whom it is intended to represent as a noble character. (p. 397.)

How do we know this? Why should Gloucester be 'intended' to be a noble character? Therefore, continues Tolstoy,

> . . . these words of Gloucester's at the very beginning of the piece, were merely for the purpose of informing the public in an amusing way of the fact that Gloucester has a legitimate and an illegitimate son. (p. 398.)

'Purpose'. So, too, Bridges often thinks he has found Shakespeare's 'purpose' of pleasing a vulgar audience. Many writers have like-

wise played games with Shakespeare's 'intentions'. The attempt is quite unnecessary, success always impossible, and, if achieved, would be necessarily irrelevant if not meaningless. Next I shall remark on another aspect of Bridges's criticism of *Macbeth*.

The matter of Macbeth's temptation, it is argued, is not treated scientifically. Bridges realizes that we cannot say it is 'unnatural' as depicted by the poet, since 'in nature we cannot weigh or know all the motives or springs of action'. All we can say is, that it 'is not nature, in the sense of being susceptible of the same analysis as that by which the assumptions of science would investigate nature'. That is, presumably, the *Macbeth* problem is less easily analysed than a real human problem of the same kind. Which is partly true, since a real problem would present, probably, a deceptive appearance of simplicity. But motive is always vague, a complex woven of conscious desire, semi-conscious promptings, opportunity, and, in addition, certain unknown quantities which any analysis will falsify. The *Macbeth* vision strips the veil of 'causality' and 'intention', and such like surface concepts by which we attempt to simplify the complicated interactions of appearances. It is true that 'we cannot weigh or know all the motives or springs of action . . .'. With consummate art the poet has forced us to pierce below such ready assurances as we habitually use; has forced us to forgo the comfortable 'assumptions of science'. And this very vagueness, irrationality, and mystery, that baffles Bridges in the first act vitalizes the whole play, reiterated and reinforced by numerous events, actions, speeches, and metaphors throughout. The play presents a vision of essential evil in all its irrationality. Those reiterations I have observed in *The Wheel of Fire*. Again, the critic has attacked the poet for his profundity, regarding as an ugly blot the very signature of his genius.

There is no question of blame. Writing when he did, Bridges could not be expected to read the deeper meanings in Shakespeare. His very complaints, like Tolstoy's, are a step towards understanding. Tolstoy and Bridges suffered from clear thinking: which differentiates them from their predecessors. It is for us to make a further advance. The analytic critic of Shakespeare will henceforth know that he must first grasp the vitalizing idea behind the phenomena of the plays: otherwise his criticism will be vapid.

In the same way Bridges was insensitive to the vitalizing idea in *Measure for Measure*. 'The pardon of Angelo', he says, 'will hardly find an advocate' (p. 7). And yet the play imperatively demands such a conclusion, as certainly as the parable of *The Prodigal Son*. The play is soaked in Christian ethics from start to finish, as I have

shown in my detailed analysis. *Measure for Measure* presents a kind of thesis. It has a very clear ethical plan. But the poet's compressed dramatic method has continually baffled critics who look only for 'characterization': though the 'characterization', when understood in terms of the plot, is here probably more careful and exact than elsewhere in Shakespeare. All Bridges's objections to Angelo are quite meaningless once the pattern is grasped. He even makes definitely false statements, induced by the wrong focus of his critical vision. Angelo, he says, is not a 'passionate' man: 'there is no passion in his calculating lust' (p. 11). Again:

> His temperament does not, I think, tally with the notion of the sudden outburst of an uncontrollable animal instinct which had been artificially repressed. (p. 11.)

Let us quote Shakespeare:

> What, do I love her,
> That I desire to hear her speak again,
> And feast upon her eyes? What is't I dream on?
> O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint,
> With saints dost bait thy hook! Most dangerous
> Is that temptation that doth goad us on
> To sin in loving virtue: never could the strumpet,
> With all her double vigour, art and nature,
> Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid
> Subdues me quite. Ever till now,
> When men were fond, I smiled and wonder'd how.
> (*Measure for Measure*, II. ii. 177.)

And yet, 'there is no passion in his calculating lust'. Again:

> When I would pray and think, I think and pray
> To several subjects. Heaven hath my empty words;
> Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,
> Anchors on Isabel: Heaven in my mouth,
> As if I did but only chew his name;
> And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
> Of my conception. (II. iv. 1.)

Is this not passion? But his final forgiveness is inevitable. The critic who does not like the last act of *Measure for Measure* will not be easily convinced by argument. He has so completely missed the whole point of the play. What are we to say to some one who returns from a performance of *Lear* complaining that for his part he could see nothing funny in the conclusion? The problem is the same. No Shakespearian play will reveal its riches to any one who refuses first to accept, and try to understand, it, fitting all minor discrepancies in with the main pattern, building the unity in his

own mind which the poet has built on paper. There will then be little to complain of. But it is curious that the one play of Shakespeare which concentrates most on 'character' and ethical principles generally should be the one most usually attacked on these grounds.

Both Tolstoy and Bridges attack mainly Shakespeare's characterization. Their respective remarks on *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Measure for Measure* are typical. It is clear, moreover, that they in each instance failed to see, I will not say what the poet 'intended', but what the work of art itself intends. They inspect as through a glass wrongly focused and see only a blurry chaos; they then proceed to assert that this chaos was 'intended' by the poet.

Now, although I have suggested the profound psychology that underlies the strangeness of *Macbeth*, there is clearly a sense in which Shakespeare's persons do not appear as 'natural' as Tolstoy's. We have at least the unusual pleasure of recognizing that the critic can here himself produce what he finds lacking in the subject of his hostility. Many very strange, all but impossible, things happen in Shakespeare. Tolstoy concentrates chiefly on *Lear*—which is very refreshing, since, for some reason, *Lear* has never properly stood the brunt of the ignorant attacks levelled from time to time on *Measure for Measure*, *Timon*, *Troilus*, and *Hamlet*; and surely it is as extraordinary as any.

> Then, curiously enough, to the very spot on the open heath where he is comes his father, blind Gloucester, led by an old man, and he too talks about the perversities of fate in that curious Shakespearian language. . . . (p. 409.)

A remarkable coincidence. No one can deny that this is a purely arbitrary stroke of art or artificiality. The play is crammed with them. There is 'Gloucester's jump' as Tolstoy calls it—usually passed over by commentators as a perfectly natural event. As Tolstoy points out, the whole matter of Edmund's plot and Gloucester's rejection of Edgar is 'unnatural'. Moreover, the similarity between plot and sub-plot is itself surely a coincidence:

> The fact that the relation of Lear to his daughters is just the same as that of Gloucester to his sons, makes one feel even more strongly that they are both arbitrarily invented and do not flow from the characters or the natural course of events. (p. 420.)

This is undeniable. Nor is all this solely due to the necessities of dramatic art. Tolstoy quotes from the old play, *Leir*, to show how it is better than Shakespeare's in this respect. He makes his point clearly, and is, from his own view of art, here, however, irrelevant,

perfectly correct. Similarly, he shows how the original tale of *Othello* has been, as it were, deliberately made more unnatural by Shakespeare. He writes of Iago's motives very much as Bridges of Macbeth's:

> There are many motives, but they are all vague; in the romance there is one motive and it is simple and clear. (p. 431.)

Tolstoy and Bridges are ever in close agreement.

Bridges likewise observes Shakespeare's habit of altering the clear reasons for things which he finds in his 'source':

> For instance, in *The Merchant of Venice*, the love of Antonio for Bassanio, which in the absence of explanation appears romantic, is merely carried over without its motive from the old story, in which Antonio is Bassanio's godfather, and adopts him and loves him as his own son. Again, Antonio's melancholy with which Shakespeare opens his play so well, using it as an interesting attraction and another romantic trait,—very valuable as preparation for his conduct,—is develop'd from a hint in the novel, where Antonio is sad on account of Bassanio's ill-successes. And this is an example of the greater interest of such a mood when unaccounted for, since in the original story it is of no special value. (p. 20.)

Bridges is often, as here, on the point of seeing the solution: namely, that we must accept Shakespeare's people before we understand them; and that, if we do this, we find our understanding not only of them, but of actual life, immeasurably enriched. Again,

> It would seem from such instances that Shakespeare sometimes judged conduct to be dramatically more effective when not adequately motived. In *The Winter's Tale* the jealousy of Leontes is senseless, whereas in the original story an adequate motive is developed. (p. 21.)

But *Othello* was altogether too much for Bridges, as for Tolstoy, who, however, thought it not the best but the 'least bad' (p. 429) of Shakespeare's plays. Both critics agree that the play is thoroughly weak in mechanism. 'The whole thing is impossible' (p. 23), says Bridges. It induces in him 'exasperation':

> . . . and seeing how cleverly everything is calculated to this effect, I conclude that it was Shakespeare's intention, and that what so hurts me was only a pleasurable excitement to his audience, whose gratification was relied on to lull their criticism. (p. 24.)

Exactly: 'gratification' must 'lull' our 'criticism' before we stand any chance of understanding. Certainly, *Othello* witnesses a sequence of amazing improbabilities; but if they appear harsher than elsewhere—as they do to Bridges—this is because the persons are more clearly differentiated and realized as individuals distinct

from their world than are those in *Lear* or *Macbeth*. Nor is there here the usual power of dominating atmosphere to force our too unwilling 'suspension of disbelief'. The 'better' Shakespeare's 'characterization', the cruder his plot may sometimes appear. I will attempt now to clear the issue. And if my arguments may seem to lead to complexity and excessive intellectualization, I reply that such qualities are forced by Tolstoy's attack. It would be easy enough to defend Shakespeare with the same dogmatic simplicity as Tolstoy uses: but that would scarcely resolve our difficulty.

III

Tolstoy himself will help us:

> That a great mastery in the presentation of character is attributed to Shakespeare arises from his really possessing a peculiarity which, when helped out by the play of good actors, may appear to superficial observers to be a capacity to manage scenes in which a movement of feeling is expressed. However arbitrary the positions in which he puts his characters, however unnatural to them the language he makes them speak, however lacking in individuality they may be, the movement of feeling itself, its increase and change and the combination of many contrary feelings, are often expressed correctly and powerfully in some of Shakespeare's scenes. (p. 435.)

That is valuable. Shakespeare's power is not merely representative. He does not show us people acting or speaking as people ordinarily do. For one thing, his persons usually speak blank verse: which would be intolerable in real life. To understand Shakespeare, one must make this original acceptance: to believe, first, in people who speak poetry; thence in human actions which subserve a poetic purpose; and, finally, in strange effects in nature which harmonize with the persons and their acts; the whole building a massive statement which, if accepted in its entirety, induces a profound experience in the reader or spectator. Now Tolstoy, concentrating here on 'characters', sees that a single person in the drama may well express variations of feeling, complex and contradicting emotions. This is just what poetry can do better than prose. In this way the poetic dramatist strips the appearance from human affairs, laying bear the essence. Into that naked world of burning thought and quick-changing emotion, that psychic world half-known to ourselves and carefully obscured from our neighbour, to that world the poet directs our experiencing minds. What Tolstoy observes in single persons is, however, even more true of the whole Shakespearian art-form. The thoughts and emotions

of the protagonist are usually, in Shakespeare's greater plays, the substance not only of him, but his world. He is, indeed, one with his world. He speaks unnaturally, perhaps: his world is usually, in varied ways, unnatural. And Tolstoy sees that 'the movement of feeling' is, in a sense, true, though the language be unnatural: in the same way, if we have regard to the whole art-form, 'the movement of feeling' is true, though the events be unnatural. Again, the Shakespearian world is not the world we habitually see. But it is the world we experience: the poignant world of primal feeling, violent subterranean life, and wayward passionate thought, controlled, denied, hidden often, then up-gushing to surprise ourselves; the inner world we experience, the world we live and fear, but not the world we normally see; nor the world we think we understand.

Therefore Hamlet, as Tolstoy will tell us, is no true 'character'. He cannot be. 'Character' in the ethical sense is the result of co-ordinating and controlling varied impulses. I use 'impulse' as a vague word which may cover both 'thoughts' and 'emotions'. Now men do this in different ways, expressing some, repressing others. Hence they present different 'characters' to the world, and thus we have 'character' in its literary sense. The essence of objective 'characterization' is 'differentiation'; and differentiation involves limitation. If the 'character' be not properly limited and defined, he is the less precisely drawn as a 'character'. Now, in actual life we do well to hide and repress certain instincts. But such dangerous impulses may be often the very substance of art. Indeed, there is clearly a close relation between repressed emotions or thoughts and artistic expression: hence the literary art-form is usually compact of such impulses. These are often split into different 'characters': the more strictly each is limited and defined the less universally poetic he will be as a unit, and the more perfect as a 'character'. But the quintessentially poetic figure may have a full share of these impulses. Now Hamlet is such a figure. He is more than protagonist: he is a play in himself. He expresses many impulses, good and evil, and thus is one of Shakespeare's most universal single creations. As men are not different in the instincts and desires they possess, but only in those they express, the deeper we go in human understanding, the less ultimate meaning we must attribute to differences of character between man and man. And if much of the wide poetry of life is to be confined in one person, as it is in Hamlet, his 'character' will automatically cease to exist. So madness, or rather frenzied sleep, disturbs Ahab, in *Moby Dick*, so that he rises from his bed. And Melville writes:

> This latter was the eternal, living principle or soul in him; and in sleep, being for the time dissociated from the characterizing mind, which at other times employed it for its outer vehicle or agent, it spontaneously sought escape from the scorching contiguity of the frantic thing, of which, for the time, it was no longer an integral.
>
> (*Moby Dick*, xliv.)

The word 'characterizing' is significant. Hence Hamlet has no 'character', as Tolstoy saw:

> But as it is accepted that Shakespeare, the genius, could write nothing bad, learned men devote all the power of their minds to discovering extraordinary beauties in what is an obvious and glaring defect—particularly obvious in *Hamlet*—namely, that the chief person of the play has no character at all. And lo and behold profound critics announce that in this drama, in the person of Hamlet, is most powerfully presented a perfectly new and profound character, consisting in this, that the person has no character; and that in this absence of character lies an achievement of genius—the creation of a profound character! And having decided this, the learned critics write volumes upon volumes, until the laudations and explanations of the grandeur and importance of depicting the character of a man without a character fill whole libraries. (p. 434.)

Exactly. Tolstoy sees the truth. But there is more to say.

In Shakespeare it is usual to find what is first a recurrent idea or image, or set of images, later expanded into a whole play. The same happens with poetic style in general. Now the whole business of poetic drama is to present persons speaking the soul-language of poetry, but otherwise more or less correspondent with real life. We are shown a visionary life where humanity ceases to be comparatively dumb. Art always discloses the inner flame of reality:

> Transparent Helena! Nature shows art,
> That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart.
>
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II. ii. 104.)

This is a matter of style, irrespective of plot. But, as though this were not enough, in Shakespeare's greater tragedies the same process is reflected in the plot too. The hero, or his world, suffers a rough tearing away of all superficial coverings, leaving the spirit exposed: thus there is created an opportunity by which the protagonist (in *Hamlet*), or his whole world (in *Macbeth*), becomes, as it were, doubly poetic. Thus the process by which an image may develop into a play is paralleled by this process by which poetry itself—which is largely a revelation of 'soul' or 'spirit'—is expanded into plots where the persons endure, in their actuality, a similar unique disclosure. In this sense, too, Hamlet is quintessentially

poetic. Therefore we may say that even if he had a 'character' before the action, events—especially the sepulchral revelation of the ghost—so tear the superficial coverings of life from his eyes; tear also the superficial consciousness from his mind; that they leave him a naked soul, confronting the naked soul of mankind. And in this consists his especially intense tragic poetry. Similarly in *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* reality is ript open and naked spirit exposed, flaring its fires through Rome, glaring its hideous torment in Scotland. Or in *Lear*, deceptive appearance is agonizingly withdrawn, a deceptive consciousness dethroned, and Lear himself reaches self-knowledge through the fantastic leaping devils of lunacy, knowledge of his own soul. In all these plays there is a violent, extravagant, lurid spirit-world of some sort exposed; and in *Timon*, too, the tinsel glitter of civilization and humanism is withdrawn, leaving mankind naked to the imprecations of the naked Timon.[1]

All these plays present a vision which deliberately looks deeper than 'character' even in the more poetic sense by which we speak of the characters in *Henry IV*; deeper than character or any realistic experience. And we must note that in so far as the artist plumbs thus deep in his soundings he tends to create sombre plays, tragic plays, plays instinct with elements black, fearful, evil, and spirits of nightmare fantasy. The protagonist will thus often be mad. Psychologically, we may say that the artist is liberating the deeper instincts most habitually unrecognized and repressed. But such instincts may yet again be blended with brighter essences and create again new beauty as profound as these yet less terrible: such art will immediately appear more realistic. Since, beyond a certain point, evil, being hostile to life and therefore unnatural, must, in any extreme vision, have an extraordinary and unnatural expression; whereas what is good for life is, at an extreme, necessarily more life-like. Thus *Antony and Cleopatra*, blending tragedy with romance, is more nearly correspondent to actual affairs than the sombre plays: its theme is love, and the love-instinct is good; and what is most good tends to be most life-like, and needs no violent plot and symbolism such as we find in *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*. But such life-likeness is far from photographic: it is still intensely poetic, containing all elements exposed in those sombre statements, yet mating them afresh to human and natural actuality in terms of emotional and intellectual language far from any normal speech. Thus numerous variations are played on 'characterization' in

[1] A few sentences here I find unintentionally carried over into my book *The Christian Renaissance*.

Shakespeare. In *Othello* and *Coriolanus* the persons are very firmly differentiated and fairly 'natural'; in *Timon*, firmly differentiated but scarcely 'natural' in the usual sense; in *Antony and Cleopatra* 'natural' but not very solidly differentiated; in *Lear*, and still more in *Macbeth*, often both 'unnatural' (in the sense of 'remarkable' or 'strange') and slightly differentiated. But in all these greater plays the whole vision is primary: human realism, sometimes natural, sometimes unnatural, only exists in vassalage to this poetic vision. And so Hamlet especially, who is formed as a person of the visionary substance which vitalizes the greater tragedies, has no 'character'. He is more than 'literary': he is like a real person with a real person's potentiality for all things, in which he resembles Cleopatra. The persons surrounding him are nearer 'characters' in the literary sense: they are well differentiated. Hamlet is universal. In him we recognize ourselves, not our acquaintances. Possessing all characters, he possesses none.

It is, indeed, not surprising that Tolstoy should have found fault with Shakespeare's 'characterization'. In his sense, it clearly does not exist:

> If the characters utter whatever comes to hand and as it comes to hand and all in one and the same way as in Shakespeare, even the effect of gesture is lost; and therefore whatever blind worshippers of Shakespeare may say, Shakespeare does not show us characters. (p. 424.)

Tolstoy would have all the persons speak differently, according to their 'characters'. But Shakespeare's persons make utterance from a height where all men speak alike: the height of universal experience, refracted often in human terms, voiceless save by poetry.

IV

I shall next show more clearly how both Tolstoy and Bridges have failed to appreciate Shakespeare primarily through neglect of his imaginative and symbolic effects, due to the excessive emphasis placed on Shakespeare's characterization throughout nineteenth-century commentary.

It is strange that Shakespeare's most subtle symbolic effects should expose him to charges of vulgarity and grossness. Both critics find Shakespeare guilty of excessive vulgarity and exaggeration. For example, Bridges writes:

> And this provides an ample account of the next fault that offends my feelings, that is what may be called brutality, which, though often mingled with the indelicacy already spoken of, must be distinguished from it. (p. 4.)

He remarks on 'the extravagant grossness of Leontes' language to Hermione', and asserts that 'the coarse terms in which Claudio repudiates Hero enfeeble the plot of *Much Ado*'. Now in *The Wheel of Fire* I have already sufficiently indicated how the horrors of sex-loathing are necessary to the patterning of many plays; indeed often, as in *Troilus* and *Hamlet*, are primary themes. It is the same with Leontes. And, as for *Much Ado*, Claudio's behaviour very considerably modifies our idea of Claudio as a person in the play. It is dramatically dynamic. Probably the critic means that Claudio's words are out of place in a person whom it is 'intended' to represent as a gentleman. So Bridges finds Shakespeare's dialogue 'pitched in extravagant tones' (p. 6). And Tolstoy says the same:

> In Shakespeare everything is exaggerated: the actions are exaggerated, so are their consequences, the speeches of the characters are exaggerated, and therefore at every step the possibility of artistic impression is infringed. (p. 438.)

Now it will be quite obvious that this and all the complaints about characterization are due to a single cause: an utter failure to focus imaginatively the proper poetic pattern to be inspected. Most of the difficulties are swiftly resolved by any competent imaginative interpretation.

Bridges is repelled by a speech in *The Tempest*:

> . . . in proximity to Prospero's romantic cell there is a 'filthy mantled poole' which is the occasion of a disgusting utterance in the mouth of the delicate Ariel. (p. 5.)

Now Ariel's remark as to how the pool 'o'erstunk' the feet of his victims may seem unpleasant. Possibly, it does not suit Ariel. I could say that I thought it harmless, but that would be merely my own opinion. What does matter, however, is this: we should be more ready to receive the poet's message. 'Characterization' may not here be primary. There may be something else we ought to consider. The 'filthy mantled pool' is indeed symbolically of great importance: a fitting punishment for the coarseness, the lust and villainy and greed, of the delinquents. Just as Falstaff is tipped into the Thames mud and later has his fat body tormented by gnomes and fairies, these suggesting that spiritual element his lust has wronged, so Caliban and Trinculo and Stephano are likewise chased and punished by Ariel and Prospero's spirits, and left in a bog. And in Ariel's words we have a reminder that their filthy punishment is to be related to their own uncleanness, their essential earthiness and lack of spirit-beauty. His phrase is appropriately vivid. Now clearly, whether or not Bridges would have been

satisfied with this explanation, he shows no signs that he has even considered it. Nor could we expect him to have done so.

The poet's vision is thus often wronged by a critical intelligence which does not see the vitalizing plan and purpose beating in the incidents and persons, without some sympathy with which those incidents and persons themselves appear unreal and often vulgar. Bridges necessarily finds *The Winter's Tale* impossible. Clearly, his method could not begin to understand it. For what scheme of 'characterization' could ever account for Hermione's extraordinary behaviour? It is amusing to see the realistic critical intelligence at work on a poet's vision of immortality as though it were a newspaper account of a street event. Nor is it surprising that 'tempests', too, come under the shadow of this criticism:

> And how easy it would have been to have provided a more reasonable ground for Othello's jealousy. If in the break of the second act his vessel had been delay'd a week by the storm, those days of anxiety and officious consolation would have given the needed opportunity, and the time-contradictions might also have been avoided. (p. 23.)

How easy, indeed. And how easy to accept the play as it is without making dream pictures of what it might be. And what if the tempest is here far more important than any 'reasonable' grounds for jealousy, or time-contradictions? The *Othello* tempest is presented as powerless to hurt or delay the lovers: that is its place in *Othello*. It is to be contrasted with the tempests of passion that follow. By the time he came to *Othello* the poet might at least be allowed to put his tempest where and how he chose. He had surely had enough practice by then. Why attempt to rewrite the drama and alter the symbolic effects? Such is the method of false criticism.

Tolstoy also comes up against tempests. Now there is a tempest in *King Lear* as well as in *Othello* and the other plays. And this tempest worried Tolstoy. It was a 'coarse embellishment'. He writes:

> Act III begins with thunder, lightning, and storm—a special kind of storm such as there never was before, as one of the characters in the play says. (p. 405.)

Again,

> Lear walks about the heath and utters words intended to express despair: he wishes the winds to blow so hard that they (the winds) should crack their cheeks, and that the rain should drench everything, and that the lightning should singe his white head and thunder strike the earth flat and destroy all the germs 'that make ingrateful man!' The fool keeps uttering yet more senseless words. Kent enters. Lear says that, for some reason, in this storm all criminals shall be

> discovered and exposed. Kent, still not recognized by Lear, persuades Lear to take shelter in a hovel. The fool thereupon utters a prophecy quite unrelated to the situation, and they all go off. (p. 405.)

It is easy to sneer at Tolstoy's lack of insight. But can the 'characterization' school of criticism answer Tolstoy's objections here or elsewhere? And can any school of criticism defend the fool's soliloquy? It is strange that the disintegration of Shakespeare has paid such respectful disregard to *Lear*. It certainly is not the least 'unnatural' of the plays. Tolstoy found the language quite untrue to human nature:

> No real people could speak, or could have spoken, as Lear does—saying that, 'I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb' if Regan did not receive him, or telling the winds to 'crack your cheeks', or bidding 'the wind blow the earth into the sea', or 'swell the curl'd waters 'bove the main', as the gentleman describes what Lear said to the storm. . . . (p. 423.)

Observe how Tolstoy continually returns to the tempest. His powerful mind ever penetrates to the heart of his subject: his conclusions may be wrong, but his error is worth more than most critics' truth. Again:

> Instead of the unnatural expulsion of Lear during a tempest and his roaming about the heath, in the old play Leir with Perillus during their journey to France very naturally come to the last degree of want. (p. 427.)

Shakespeare's imaginative effects repelled and worried Tolstoy, as they should repel and worry any clear-thinking critic who has not properly understood their nature:

> The artificiality of the positions, which do not arise from a natural course of events and from the characters of the people engaged, and their incompatibility with the period and the place, is further increased by the coarse embellishments Shakespeare continually makes use of in passages meant to be specially touching. The extraordinary storm during which Lear roams about the heath, or the weeds which for some reason he puts on his head, as Ophelia does in *Hamlet*, or Edgar's attire—all these effects, far from strengthening the impression produce a contrary effect. (p. 421.)

Again Tolstoy selects for attack matters of primary importance. For Lear's crown of flowers holds a deep significance. It is the Crown of his Purgatory. It is a symbol with many relations. It touches the Crown of Thorns of the Crucifixion. And yet its flower-sweetness also suggests and prepares us for the child-like innocency of Lear's latter state, when he is reunited in love with

Cordelia. In this it resembles Ophelia's crown of flowers. It is 'fantastic'—witness Capell's direction: 'Enter Lear fantastically dressed with wild flowers'. Or, as Tolstoy puts it, 'just then, Lear enters, for some reason all covered with wild flowers' (p. 413). This, with the crown described by Cordelia, suggests the 'fantastic' madness that he has endured, and also the 'wild' simple nature which he reaches after the loss of his kingship, leaving civilization for love and nature's simplicity. And then again, the crown reminds us of Cleopatra's Diadem of Love, or Cassius' wreath, suggesting victory through and in suffering and tragedy. So various may be the content of a symbol; so exquisite is the Shakespearian imagination. Similarly we could write on Ophelia's crown, or Edgar's nakedness. But all this is missed by the specialists in 'characterization'.

In the same way the fine 'sun' and 'moon' symbolism of *Othello* was missed by Tolstoy:

> A man who is preparing to murder some one he loves cannot utter such phrases, and still less after the murder can he say that the sun and moon ought now to be eclipsed and the globe to yawn, nor can he, whatever kind of a nigger he may be, address devils, inviting them to roast him in sulphur, and so forth. (p. 430.)

And here, again, Tolstoy is worrying at a truth. Othello's language is decorative, excessively so; and we cannot understand the play properly without attending to this quality. I have written of that elsewhere. Othello himself is compact of romance, highly-coloured, rich, exotic. And his words are in a style unique in Shakespeare. They often border on the sentimental, luxuriating in emotion:

> If he really suffers from grief and remorse then, when intending to kill himself, he would not utter phrases about his own services, about a pearl, about his eyes dropping tears '*as fast as the Arabian trees their medicinable gum*', and still less could he talk about the way a Turk scolded a Venetian, and how '*thus*' he punished him for it. (p. 430.)

There is justice in Tolstoy's complaint. But he misses the power of Shakespeare's symbols, the 'sun' and 'moon', whose light shines or dims in Shakespeare according to love's fortunes on earth, he misses the power of the 'jewel' in Shakespeare's love poetry, or the fine importance always given to warrior-service, such as Othello's, throughout the plays. These, the imaginative effects and what Professor Barker Fairley has well called the 'philosophic invariables', are not properly received. But Tolstoy and Bridges both continually worry at the important, the significant, points; irritated by them, as though semi-consciously aware of the true Shakespearian excellencies, yet powerless to focus their beauty.

So Shakespeare is put down as a writer pandering to vulgar tastes:

> 'But one must not forget the times in which Shakespeare wrote', say his belauders. 'It was a time of cruel and coarse manners, a time of the then fashionable euphuism, that is, an artificial manner of speech —a time of forms of life strange to us, and therefore to judge Shakespeare one must keep in view the times when he wrote.' (p. 438.)

So writes Tolstoy, here stating admirably the main thesis advanced by Bridges, and followed by modern commentary. Failing to find any inherent unity in the art-form, the critic has to overstep the limit of aesthetic commentary and try to 'account for' the artistic essence in terms of its 'causes', its 'circumstances', its supposed inartistic 'purposes'. Thus our modern 'realistic' criticism of Shakespeare came into being: aptly, it soon developed into disintegration, such pseudo-realism and pseudo-scholarship, if carried far, being ever essentially disintegrating and destructive.

V

Tolstoy indicts Shakespeare on two main charges. First, his poor characterization and unnatural effects generally; and, second, his lack of the religious essence. Granted the Shakespeare given to him by the commentators, we cannot easily blame him. I have answered the charge against 'characterization'. I have already partly answered Tolstoy's second point; but I offer a few more remarks thereon.

Following the commentators, Tolstoy finds Shakespeare's ethic intolerable. He quotes Gervinus at length and Brandes. Both these consider themselves able to say just what Shakespeare thought wrong and what he thought right. Their conclusions appear rash indeed. Tolstoy, however, thought otherwise:

> . . . And any one who reads attentively the works of Shakespeare cannot but acknowledge that the attribution of this view of life to Shakespeare by those who praise him is perfectly correct. (p. 445.)

Now Tolstoy saw clearly that great art is not independent of religion. He also, guided by the commentators, quite failed to find any sort of satisfactory religion, philosophy, or any unity whatsoever, in the Shakespearian universe. 'The characters utter whatever comes to hand and as it comes to hand' (p. 424). So he well emphasizes the importance of religion to the drama:

> Art, especially dramatic art which demands for its realization extensive preparations, expenditure, and labour, was always religious, that is to say, its object was to evoke in man a clearer conception of that relation of man to God attained at the time by the advanced members of the society in which the art was produced.

> So it should be by the nature of the matter, and so it always had been among all nations: among the Egyptians, Hindus, Chinese, and Greeks—from the earliest time that we have knowledge of the life of man. . . . (p. 452.)

Tolstoy observes how the decline of the Miracle and Morality plays synchronized with the rediscovery of Greek models, which were favoured by dramatists who should have worked out for themselves a new Christian drama; and how afterwards, eighteenth-century writers in Germany, becoming wearied by the French classical school, yet still admiring the Greek tragedians, looked for something of the same sort to copy:

> These men, not understanding that the sufferings and strife of their heroes had a religious significance for the Greeks, imagined that it was only necessary to reject the inconvenient law of the three Unities, and without containing any religious element corresponding to the beliefs of their own time, the representations of various incidents in the lives of historic personages, and of strong human passions in general would afford a sufficient basis for the drama. (p. 454.)

Goethe praised Shakespeare. His work satisfied the demands of the moment. Shakespearian idolatry was born in Germany, and quickly overspread Europe. Such is Tolstoy's account. So Shakespeare was praised for work from a religious point of view quite chaotic:

> To make their praise of the whole of Shakespeare more convincing they composed an aesthetic theory, according to which a definite religious view of life is not at all necessary for the creation of works of art in general, or for the drama in particular. (p. 456.)

How far Tolstoy is exactly right in his historical details need not concern us. But his main position is clear enough. He cannot accept as a great poet a writer who has no religious centre, background, or framework for his art.

'Religion' is a vague term, but definition is here hardly necessary. Tolstoy uses it in a wide sense and we may do the same, taking its content to range from an exact orthodoxy to an individual's philosophy of life. And, indeed, Shakespeare presents us very definitely with just such a variable religion-philosophy compound as Tolstoy seems to require. He is an admirable example of the exact kind of writer Tolstoy in theory admired:

> By 'the religious essence of art', I reply, I mean not an external inculcation of any religious truth in artistic guise, and not an allegorical representation of those truths, but the expression of a definite view of life corresponding to the highest religious understanding of a given period: an outlook which, serving as the impelling motive

> for the composition of the drama, permeates the whole work though the author is unconscious of it. So it has always been with true art, and so it is with every true artist in general and with dramatists especially. Hence, as happened when the drama was a serious thing, and as should be according to the essence of the matter, he alone can write a drama who has something to say to men—something highly important for them—about man's relation to God, to the universe, to all that is infinite and unending. (p. 457.)

This is the true Shakespeare that eluded Tolstoy; the Shakespeare that emerges from attention to his imaginative qualities. Here is the Shakespeare Tolstoy rightly derived from the would-be laudatory commentators:

> But when, thanks to the German theories about objective art, an idea had been established that, for drama, this is not wanted at all, then a writer like Shakespeare who in his own soul had not formed religious convictions corresponding to his period, and who had even no convictions at all, but piled up in his plays all possible events, horrors, fooleries, discussions, and effects, could evidently be accepted as the greatest of dramatic geniuses. (p. 457.)

Tolstoy's attack forcibly insists on a truth that we must realize in our study of Shakespeare. It is essential with such a writer to understand that axis on which his work revolves: otherwise we necessarily find chaos. And the great writer, as Tolstoy says, is not chaotic.

The drama has, indeed, fallen from its high origin. The problem is crucial to-day, and depends on our understanding of Shakespeare. Whilst Shakespeare's plays are allowed to stand, insouciantly regardless of all ultimate questions, then we can safely continue to deny any necessary religious content to the greatest dramatic poetry; since no one will readily deny to Shakespeare at least an honourable place in dramatic history. Once, however, we see that Shakespeare is an artist fit to stand by Dante in point of religious apprehension, then the case for the religious message and purpose of the drama becomes unanswerable.

We must attend to the true interpretation of Shakespeare. Then we shall recognize the deeper meanings of his romantic comedies, their dreamland melodies set beyond the stormy seas of misfortune. And we must observe the blending of that music with the tempestuous passions of the tragedies. We must understand the 'disorder' philosophy of the Histories, the death-forces in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* embattled against life, the Christian ethic of *Measure for Measure*, the purgatorial vision of *Lear*, the accomplished paradise of *Antony and Cleopatra*. And beyond those we shall be directed to the Birth and Resurrection dramas of the Final Plays; recognizing

therein true myths of immortality caught from the penetralium of mystery by one of the few greatest writers of the world.

Tolstoy understood and trenchantly stated the modern problem:

> The life of humanity only approaches perfection by the elucidation of religious consciousness (the only principle securely uniting men one with another). The elucidation of the religious consciousness of man is accomplished through all sides of man's spiritual activity. One side of that activity is art. One part of art, and almost the most important, is the drama.
>
> And therefore the drama, to deserve the importance attributed to it, should serve the elucidation of religious consciousness. Such the drama always was, and such it was in the Christian world. But with the appearance of Protestantism in its broadest sense—that is to say, the appearance of a new understanding of Christianity as a teaching of life—dramatic art did not find a form corresponding to this new understanding of religion, and the men of the Renaissance period were carried away by the imitation of classical art. This was most natural, but the attraction should have passed, and art should have found, as it is now beginning to find, a new form corresponding to the altered understanding of Christianity. (p. 459.)

What 'new form' did Tolstoy expect? Probably a strictly ethical drama, concerned, not with theology, poetic symbolism, death and resurrection, that world of high and creative imagination proper to great art, but rather with the fine simplicities of goodness, human sacrifice, human labour, human love. A drama of 'characterization'.

One cannot deny the rugged beauty of Tolstoy's gospel. But it is not enough; not enough for a great religious drama. Such drama will be not merely ethical, but metaphysical too, often theocentric, always intensely smybolical. It must body forth in terms of human action and the varied melodies of speech the emotions that surge in man, the grief that wrings his soul, the joy that lights his laughter; and it must suggest the supernatural forces that prompt his little act, the purposes eternal which man serves alike with sun and star and waving corn. It will rend the veil which shrouds the ultimate mysteries of birth and death, so that graves wake their sleepers at its command. Persons both satanic and divine will inter-thread its story, the multitudinous seas sound their war in the tempests of its action, and the wrath of its gods thunder from heaven to earth, while all eternities shall linger in its music.

Other publications, *Myth and Miracle*, Burrow, 1929; *The Wheel of Fire*, Oxford, 1930; *The Imperial Theme*, Oxford 1931; *The Shakespearian Tempest*, Oxford, 1932; *The Christian Renaissance*, Macmillan, 1933.

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SOME CENTENARY REFLECTIONS

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SIR WALTER SCOTT

SOME CENTENARY REFLECTIONS

IT is, perhaps, a little curious that we should meet upon Milton's birthday to honour the centenary of Walter Scott's death. Though in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, *Woodstock*, and *Peveril of the Peak* Scott covered the whole span of Milton's conscious life, and though his acquaintance with the poet, begun in his seventh year, was both wide and deep, there was scant spiritual affinity between the 'Author of Waverley' and the great Englishman born three hundred and twenty-four years ago to-day. Scott's Calvinist breeding was always tempered and mitigated by his Cavalier blood. He could apprehend—no man better—the more noble and the more subtle excellences of both English and Scottish Puritanism; he could recreate the finer as well as the baser type of Covenanter and Parliamentarian; he could see the dim gold threads interwoven with the uncouth hodden grey of Cromwell's personality. Yet for him the whole conclusion of the matter would appear to have been

> Were there death in the cup
> Here's a health to King Charles!

and he had all Dr. Johnson's sturdy reluctance to 'let the Whig dogs have the best of it'.

True, when Everard Markham quotes *Comus* to Sir Henry Lee the good old man, unaware of the identity of the author, breaks forth in praises of 'so sweet a harp'; but one feels that it gave Scott peculiar pleasure to administer, by means of Sir Henry's subsequent reactions, a hearty Royalist drubbing to 'the blasphemous and bloody-minded author of the *Defensio Populi Anglicani*'. The affinity between Sir Walter and Wordsworth was always an imperfect affinity; and it is certain that in the year 1802 the very last sentiment to which Scott would have been likely to give utterance was

> Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour!

Yet, speaking in London, on Milton's birthday, to an audience composed mainly, if not wholly, of defenceless Sassenachs, it seems not inappropriate to pause for a moment and consider those three novels wherein is preserved Sir Walter's conception of that seventeenth-century England by which Milton was 'borne, shaped, made aware'.

Of these three the first two, *The Fortunes of Nigel* and *Peveril of the Peak*, belong to what John Buchan has called 'a quinquennium which may be regarded as the high noon-tide of Scott's life': the third, *Woodstock*, was written under the shadow of Ballantyne's ruin. None the less, to many English readers who are repelled by the Doric diction in *Tales of my Landlord*, and who find *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman* little—if at all—more convincing than *The Castle of Otranto*, there is something peculiarly refreshing and delightful in the first and third romances of this English group. The going is, of course, much heavier in *Peveril*.

Now, this re-creation of the England of the first Stuart and the England of the Commonwealth by Walter Scott represented a far more remarkable exercise of the *génie évocateur* than did his treatment of the genuinely Scottish world of the Covenanters and the Jacobites or the artificially feudal world of the second Plantagenet. When in imagination he projected himself backward into the society of Mucklewrath and Macleish, Duncan Macwheeble and Dugald Dalgetty he was writing of things and of people with which and with whom he had had spiritual and material contacts, however remote, however indirect. The Scottish figures, grim or gallant, fanatic or forlorn, were drawn from his ain folk: the Scottish backgrounds were familiar to his outer as well as to his inner eye. In his mock medievalism he had been greatly helped by Horace Walpole, Bishop Percy, and Gray. He had no debts to acknowledge when it came to his English novels. Plays and poems, pamphlets and sermons, he laid them all under contribution, but in none of these could he find all the ingredients necessary for a three-dimensional picture of the men and women who lived and died in Milton's England. He found them, where Shakespeare found his noble Romans and his disillusioned Greeks, in the secret chambers of his own soul.

In form and moving *The Fortunes of Nigel* is 'gey sib' (English devotees of Scott will require no translation of that phrase) to *Kenilworth*, but it is not, as Lord Geraldin thought he was to Eveline, '*ower* sib'. Both novels were obviously written in the alternating glow and gloom of remembered Elizabethan comedies and tragedies: indeed the Elizabethan colour overflows into the Jacobean framework and subdues unto itself the Caroline tints of Shadwell's *Squire of Alsatia*. Both novels contain a rather high percentage of that sort of dialogue which by its racy quality would surprise—and might even *please*—those youthful modern dissentients who imagine that Scott was as constantly preoccupied as was Mr. Podsnap with potential blushes upon the cheek of the Young Person!

In pace and impact, scope and scale, *The Fortunes of Nigel* is a better novel than *Kenilworth*, and it is further enriched by the glorious and unforgettable portrait of James the First and Sixth. The background, moreover, is never out of focus: architectual details are never made to jut forward and claim the beholder's attention to the obliteration of those figures which they ought merely to throw into relief. Scott does not attempt a horizon profile of Stuart London, a sort of Hollar print in colour, as Monsignor Benson did in *Oddsfish*: he is more chary than usual in his description of costumes and accessories; and, best of all, he contrives to introduce some streaks of crude and homely Scottish warp to strengthen the woof of English rose and green and gold.

Few of Scott's novels open worse, though none ends better. The first paragraph gives no hint of the good things to come: it is more prosy, more pompous, more intolerably long-winded even than the initial passages of *Ivanhoe*, *Waverley*, and *Rob Roy*: it is less encouraging even than the sort of first paragraph usually associated with the works of G. P. R. James—though I have not myself found in those works the famous 'two horsemen' who 'might have been observed'. In case you should have been so happy as to forget it, here is that first paragraph:

> The long-continued hostilities which had for centuries separated the south and the north divisions of the island of Britain had been happily terminated by the succession of the pacific James I to the English crown. But although the united crown of England and Scotland was worn by the same individual, it required a long lapse of time, and the succession of more than one generation, ere the inveterate national prejudices which had so long existed betwixt the sister nations were removed, and the subjects of either side of the Tweed brought to regard those upon the opposite bank as friends and brethren.

This is bad enough: but figures and action both heave and sag dismally until, with a sudden heightening of pitch, Richie Monyplies enters, with 'his sword with a ton of iron in the handle, his grey, threadbare cloak, his step like a Frenchman, his look like a Spaniard, a book at his girdle, and a broad dudgeon dagger at the other side to show him half-pedant, half bully'. It was all too seldom that Scott employed this method of presentation, and allowed one character to describe another. It was all too often that he himself, with needless circumlocution and superfluous flourish, traced a picture as flat and smooth as any engraving that 'embellished' the *Keepsakes* and *Garlands* of the period. Never did he handle this always difficult task—of introducing an important personage for the first time—better than he does it in this novel. One

has only to compare the passage in Dalzell's *Fragments of Scottish History* from which Scott derived the main features of his King James with the carefully assembled composite in order to appreciate the exquisite art of the thing. The whole ramshackle, uncouth, incongruous but not unkingly amalgam which was James the First and Sixth is summed up in a single clause of that matchless descriptive passage in Chapter V:

> His high-crowned grey hat lay on the floor, covered with dust but encircled by a carcanet of large balas rubies.

It is no small testimony either to Scott or King Jamie that the long speeches placed by the author in the monarch's mouth are never one syllable too long. Into that mosaic there have been deftly worked chips and flakes from the *Basilikon Doron*, from the *Counterblast to Tobacco*, from the *Demonologie*, with such juxtapositions of Latin tag and homely Scots proverb, schoolman's logic and hunter's lore as the King himself loved well. A comparatively slight acquaintance with the writings of the royal pedant is enough to reveal the amused care which Scott must have given to the fitting together of those *pastiche* sections; but we may permit ourselves to regret that the plan of the story did not make it possible for James to quote one of his own 'prentice efforts in the Art of Poesie. His sonnets, written when Sidney and Shakespeare also were sonneteering, have qualities which you will seek in vain in the verse of His Majesty's poetical contemporaries, and Scott might have made capital play with such a gem as this, an actual example of the King's craftsmanship:

> And at your handis I earnestly do crave,
> O facound Mercure, with the Muses nyne,
> That for conducting guyde I may you have,
> As well unto my Pen as my Ingyne. (*Ingenium*)
> Let Readers thynke thy eloquence devyne
> O Mercure, in my Poems doth appeare;
> And that Parnassus flowing fountaine fyne
> Into my works doth shyne like cristall cleare:
> O Muses, let them thynke that they do heare
> Your voices all into my verse resound;
> And that your virteus singular and feir
> May wholly all in them be also found:
> Of all that may the perfyte Poem make
> I pray you let my verses have no lack!

Of Nigel himself it may be objected that he is more or less Quentin Durward with a ruff round his throat and roses on his shoon: yet

there is a sinister beauty about the figure of Lord Dalgarno which detaches it from the mass of Scott's younger villains. And here Scott shows unusual subtlety in letting us, like Nigel, discover Dalgarno's real character only by progressive revelation: to us, as to Glenvarloch, his address seems at first to be gallant and frank, his personality 'most generous and free from all contriving'. The English men and women are extraordinarily happy, though their descent on one side from the stock figures of the Elizabethan drama can never be forgotten for long: the betrayed burgher and his buxom, wanton wife, the love-lorn apprentice, the lean-chapped miser—they are all old acquaintances; only Trapbois has a symbolic and decorative quality which one does not meet with in any miser of literature with whom I am acquainted from Euclio through Harpagon to Ebenezer Scrooge. As he lies dead the old man resembles nothing so much as one of those stark effigies which medieval sculptors delighted to place in two-tiered tombs where the upper slab is occupied by a draped and dignified human form and the lower by a half-consumed image of dissolution and mortality.

Jin Vin, though there is little to differentiate him from the ordinary 'prentice of the Jack of Newbery breed, has some very vigorous patches of dialogue assigned to him—for example, in the interview with Dame Ursley Suddlecop, 'half-milliner, half-procuress', like her prototype Mistress Ann Turner,

> 'I hope to see *you* ride up Holborn next,' said Dame Ursley, provoked out of all her holiday and sugar-plum expressions, 'with a nosegay at your breast and a parson at your elbow!'
>
> 'That may well be,' answered Jin Vin bitterly, 'if I walk by your counsels as I have begun by them; but before that day comes you shall know that Jin Vin has the brisk boys of Fleet Street still at his wink. Yes, you jade—you shall be carted for bawd and conjurer, double-dyed in grain, and bing off to Bridewell, with every brass basin betwixt the Bar and Paul's beating before you as if the devil was banging them with his beef-hook!'

Not much anxiety about the cheek of the Young Person *there*! Such passages make it difficult to understand why Scott should have acquired the reputation of a literary host upon whose table stodge alternated with milk-and-water; but they make it less difficult to understand why Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort should have considered the Waverley novels to be *pas pour les jeunes filles*, which, being interpreted, meant 'not suitable for the Prince of Wales'!

Between the close of *The Fortunes of Nigel* and the opening of *Peveril of the Peak* there is an historical gap of something like thirty-five

years—a gap only imperfectly filled by *Woodstock*, which deals with a brief and swift sequence of events following Worcester fight. The Jacobean novel ends on a cheerful, bustling note: it ends with the wedding festivities of Glenvarloch and Margaret Ramsey, the sudden apparition of Richie Monyplies and his newly-wedded Martha, and the characteristic apostrophe of the King to the assembled company, 'My lords and lieges, let us all to our dinner, for the cock-a-leekie is a-cooling'. The Restoration novel begins with a genealogical sketch almost as irrelevant and quite as tedious as that of the Chuzzlewit family, and continues in an atmosphere of gloom and strife which gives small scope to Scott's unique and now fully-developed powers as a delineator of actual historical figures and a creator of oddities. Oddities are 'good cheap' later on, when the elfin Fenella and the impish Geoffrey Hudson intervene; but the historical figures are among the least convincing ever evoked by the Wizard's wand from the murk of the past. It was not enough to turn that sturdy Huguenot, Charlotte de la Tremouille, into a perfervid Roman Catholic, and that characteristic product of Restoration England, Zimri, Duke of Buckingham, into a grandiloquent fop fit only for the weaker type of Augustan comedy: he has actually turned Charles II into a dull dog!

It is strange that Scott who, in *Kenilworth* and *The Fortunes of Nigel*, had drawn so freely upon his knowledge of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama should have derived little or no aid and inspiration from his not less intimate knowledge of Dryden, Shadwell, and the rest, when he came to handle Restoration dialogue. This curious stodginess in *Peveril*, a stodginess extending to and embracing even Old Rowley, seems all the more incomprehensible when we compare it with *Woodstock*. True, Scott was in poor health when he was writing *Peveril*—he speaks in a letter to his actor friend Terry of 'a whoreson thickness of the blood and a depression of spirits'—but neither in body nor in mind can he have been suffering then as he was to suffer four years later, at the period when the greater part of *Woodstock* was taking shape. At *that* period, despite personal bereavement, physical handicaps, and crashing financial disasters, he brought to his task a freshness of perception, a resilience of inventive power, a flexibility of mind, which constantly reveal their influence not only in the figure of the fugitive prince but also in the ancillary sketches of Wildrake, Dr. Rochecliffe, Desborough, and even Jocelyn Joliffe and Dame Jellicot. The Charles of the earlier study is as heavy-heeled and as heavy-tongued as the Louis Kerneguy of the later is light and limber of foot and of speech. Even in his more serious moments—as when

he discloses his identity to Everard Markham—the tempo is not unduly slowed down. Can it be that morality had something to do with this contrast? That Scott found it easier to stress the engaging aspect of the royal personality when Charles was still unlucky and still young, while some dour, subconscious Calvinist complex made it hard for him to dwell upon that aspect when the King was in the hey-day of his good fortune and his bad behaviour?

It is certain that nobody could then have foreseen how far the pendulum would ultimately swing in Charles's favour. Even that stout Carlophil, Dr. Johnson, can hardly have guessed that the time would ever come when our third Stuart monarch would be represented as a sort of Portrait of a Patriot King, the conscious champion of the rights and liberties of the common people against the intolerable tyranny of the Whig oligarchy—a tyranny based largely on *gold*. Perhaps the pendulum has swung—as is the way with pendulums—a little too far; but a very distinguished man of letters remarked to me not long since that he could not find it in his heart to blame Charles too severely for taking French money in order to thwart English traitors. When Scott turned to seventeenth-century England why did he skip the actual period covered by the Civil War,

> When men fell out, as men will fall
> Who have little else to do,
> And there befell that bitter brawl
> Of sixteen-forty-two?

He was not afraid of a large and crowded canvas; he was not averse to painting battle-pieces, complete with tossing plumes, drifting smoke, and prostrate forms; he was not incapable of recording the triumphs of causes alien to the inmost heart of him. He had, indeed, done most of these things in *Rokeby*, but the historical background is there very indeterminate, even for *him*, and the men and women are no more akin to actual Puritan and Cavalier types than are the monks and chieftains of *The Lord of the Isles* to their medieval prototypes. If he had merely applied to the Civil War the methods used in prose in *Peveril* and in verse in *Rokeby* he might have given his detractors another handle against him; but if he had been able to enlist all those capacities for swift narrative and racy characterization which light up the darkest and accelerate the longest stretches of *Quentin Durward*, or *Rob Roy*, or even *Guy Mannering*, what a masterpiece we might have had! Who better than Scott could have painted a portrait of Prince Rupert, that strange, attractive compound of paladin, pirate, and soldier-of-fortune? Who better than he could have thrown into relief the

clashing personalities of the King's friends, whom no loyalties held in common could compel to common action for long? And there is a blank space in his gallery of English portraits which might then have been filled not unworthily—the space left by the absence of any well-defined, full-length delineation of the best type of *young* Cavalier. We have the *old* Cavalier in Sir Henry Lee; the raffish Cavalier in Wildrake: the country-gentleman Cavalier of the Lord Castlewood breed in Sir Godfrey Peveril: what is lacking, and conspicuously lacking, is a figure with something of the austere grace, the sober charm, of Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, a man who, like his royal master, knew how to combine in himself Puritan severity of morals with Renaissance enthusiasm for art and letters.

Some novelist who is also a poet will some day write a large-scale romance in which the lovely and short-lived England of Van Dyck and Inigo Jones, George Herbert, and Izaak Walton, may awake to a posthumous and enduring life. Its grave and gallant elders, its young men, gay with a gaiety such as the Restoration rufflers never knew, its fair, quiet-browed women, its chubby, lace-capped children, will then be seen 'walking in an air of glory' touched by that too-brief, too-brilliant light that fills the motionless landscape before the breaking of a mighty storm.

It may be that Scott was not the man to catch and hold that insubstantial pageant: it may be well that he did not make the attempt. He was quite at home in the perturbed, tumultuous setting of Cromwellian England when he embarked upon *Woodstock*.

Has Scott's fondness for what one may call 'night pieces' ever been remarked? There is perhaps none of his novels over which the blanket of the dark broods quite so heavily as it does over the whole play of *Macbeth*, but a moment's reflection will show how much of the action in *Guy Mannering*, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, *Rob Roy*, *Old Mortality*, *Rokeby*, *The Lord of the Isles*, and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* occurs either out of doors during the hours of darkness or indoors by artificial light. There is perhaps as much daylight in *Ivanhoe* as in any two of these put together; it is, I think, the least tenebrous of all the *Waverleys*, with the possible exception of *The Antiquary*.

The plot of *Woodstock*, with its moonlight mummeries in the ruined palace, its alarums and excursions, sudden arrivals and helter-skelter departures, demands that many of the most important episodes should take place after the sun has set. Several of the chief actors make their first entrances at night. Wildrake, Dr. Rochecliffe, the three Parliamentary commissioners, Albert Lee,

Charles in his disguise as Louis Kerneguy, none of these enters during the daytime, and though we catch one earliest glimpse of Cromwell beneath the frigid, searching light of the morning his unexpected arrival at Markham's house occurs on 'a dark October night', and his untimely apparition at Woodstock under 'the dim, dull cresset of the moon', while Charles himself makes his hasty exit through the wood with Alice Lee 'in utter darkness'.

A very distinguished modern historian and critic, commemorating the Scott centenary, found much to praise in the *Woodstock* portrait of Oliver Cromwell, but added, 'it is stagy, like all the rest of the book, like all the novels that Scott did not locate in Scotland'. Before we venture either to endorse this proposition or to dissent from it, let us ask ourselves what we mean by 'staginess'; whether the novels that Scott did 'locate in Scotland' are free from it; and whether, for good or ill, it is, or could ever be, wholly absent from the 'costume' novel, even from the greatest in that kind.

'Staginess' in fiction I take to mean a certain quality of style, speech, and action which causes the artificially heightened values of the stage-play to prevail for the moment over natural colour and perspective. In its more offensive sense the word may denote very dreadful things—false sentiment, bathos, bombast, incredible contortions of plot and over-stressings of character; but these things are not to be found in Scott. Curiously enough, we are seldom conscious of 'stagy' effects in reading a good *play*, though such effects are insistent and intolerable when, for our sins, we have to read a *bad* one. It might almost be maintained that few works of art have less of the limelight—to say nothing of the spotlight—about them than have the best plays which have been written and planned for presentation in an actual theatre—whether that theatre were the theatre of Dionysus at Athens, Shakespeare's Globe, or Molière's Palais Royal, with the obvious exception of the dramas of Racine and Corneille which are as 'stagy' as the ceilings painted by Verrio and Lebrun.

'Staginess'—in its kindlier sense—can hardly be said to be entirely absent from Scott's English novels; but what of the implication that there is no such defect—if defect it be—in the novels which he 'located in Scotland'? Recognition scenes are the most difficult of all scenes to keep natural and convincing—even Aeschylus felt this difficulty in the *Choephori*—and in more than one of the Scottish Waverleys such scenes occur: in the *Heart of Midlothian*, for example, when Jeanie sees Effie's unhappy son, in *Guy Mannering*, where there are two, in *The Antiquary*, where there are more than two, though one—Neville's encounter with Teresa d'Acunha—occurs

'off' and of another, the reunion of Lord Glenallan and his son, Scott writes, 'we will not attempt to describe such a meeting'. Examples could be multiplied many times and, though the actual setting is in the Isle of Wight we may, for this purpose, include *The Surgeon's Daughter* in the Scottish group and cite that amazing scene in which Zilia, stung to the heart by the reproaches of her unwitting son, 'flew to the harpsichord which stood in the room . . . and wandered over the keys, producing a wilderness of harmony, composed of passages recalled by memory or combined by her own musical talent, until at length her voice and instrument united in one of those magnificent hymns in which her youth had praised her Maker with voice and harp, like the Royal Hebrew who composed it', and then fell dead. Are these not of the stage, stagy? Again, the declamatory speech, long-drawn-out, rhetorical, minatory, is in itself a device so well suited to the theatre that its employment in fiction inevitably suggests the accents of a Sarah—Siddons or Bernhardt; and it is in *Guy Mannering*, not in any of the English novels, that Scott's most famous, and rightly famous, piece of declamation occurs, the famous speech of Meg Merrilies beginning:

> Ride your ways, ride your ways, Laird of Ellangowan—ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram—This day ye have quenched seven smoking hearths—see if the fire in your ain parlour burn the blyther for that. Ye have riven the thack off seven cottar houses—look if your ain roof-tree stand the faster! Ye may stable your stirks in the shealings at Derncleugh—see that the hare does not couch on the hearthstane at Ellangowan!

and ending:

> And now, ride e'en your ways: for these are the last words ye'll ever hear Meg Merrilies speak, and this is the last reise that I'll ever cut in the bonny woods of Ellangowan.

Another romancer's trick which savours rather of the stage than of the study is the revelatory monologue, spoken usually by some character labouring under intense emotional stress, unconscious of the full implications of the words uttered. Here again it is in a Scottish novel that we find one of the most triumphant instances of the use of this device by Scott—in the death-scene of Elspeth Mucklebackit. It may be objected that neither of these two novels, *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary*, is so essentially Scottish in substance and in spirit as are *Waverley* and *The Heart of Midlothian*, *Old Mortality*, and *Rob Roy*; but to this it might be retorted that in all of those there are patches of dramatic—even of melodramatic—

action and dialogue which switch the technique over from that of the novelist to that of the playwright. These alterations of tempo do nothing to impair the essential artistic unity of the work in which they occur. They are sometimes interpolated so happily that the reader is drawn towards the conclusion that a certain degree of 'staginess' is inseparable from historical fiction in the grand manner. Indeed, a dramatist is sometimes better able to avoid this 'stagy' quality than is the author of a costume novel. The dramatist, after all, has living puppets to manipulate, three-dimensional figures which are solid enough to cast shadows on the ground: the novelist sets in motion images which at the worst are mere phantasms and at the best lack something of the impact and reaction of real men. Moreover, the historical novelist seldom finds it easy to avoid overstatement, to eschew excessive antitheses, to eliminate distorted vision and perspective. His affair is necessarily with backgrounds that tend to look like painted 'sets', with daggers of lath and cloaks of Covent Garden velveteen; nor can he set actual human beings against his mossy battlements, or drape actual human beings in his medieval samite and miniver. It is true that in some modern novels, *Jew Süss*, for example, or *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, these handicaps are rather more successfully overcome than either Scott or Dumas knew how to do it; the boards may still be there, but they seldom creak now: there is still a backcloth, but it is often indistinguishable from the landscape which it feigns to be. New idioms and perspectives have been evolved, and are being 'tried out'. And because they *are* new such modern novels as these do not provide a just standard of comparison with the novels of an earlier age. No writer should ever be measured against his successors: if he has no contemporaries worthy to be used as units of comparison he must always be judged in relation to those who went before him, never in relation to those who followed after. Therefore the fairest method of assessing Scott's literary stature is to set him alongside his one considerable predecessor in his own particular craft—and that predecessor was Horace Walpole.

The juxtaposition of the big, burly Borderer and the finicking English fop may seem at the first glance to show the true proportions of neither; but this is not really so. Horace Walpole, more than any other antecedent writer, English, French, or German, was the ancestor of 'the Author of Waverley'. Scott's poetry, *tale quale*, had various sources, native and foreign, traditional and artificial; but Abbotsford derived in an undeflected line from Strawberry Hill, whatever the Laird of Abbotsford may say in the introduction to *Rokeby* about Shenstone and the Leasowes.

One might perhaps quote concerning 'Horry' what Scott himself said of the Last Minstrel:

> Amid the strings his fingers strayed,
> And an uncertain warbling made;

but credit is at least due to him for realizing that there were potentialities of music in the worm-eaten and half-unstrung harp of romance. It is not always apprehended with sufficient clearness what an important stage in the evolution not only of English but of European literature was reached on a certain June night in the year 1764, when Mr. Walpole dreamed a certain wild dream. Happier than Coleridge, disturbed by an importunate 'person from Porlock' before *his* dream of Kubla Khan was more than half committed to paper, Walpole was able not only to recall and record his vision but also to utilize it as the basis of a long and intricate piece of imaginative creation. It was to his former schoolfellow, William Cole, that he thus described the genesis of *The Castle of Otranto*:

> I waked one morning in the beginning of last June from a dream of which all I could recover was that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hands and I grew fond of it . . . in short, I was so engrossed with my tale, which I completed in less than two months, that one evening I wrote from the time I had drunk my tea about six o'clock till half-an-hour after one in the morning, when my hand and my fingers were so weary that I could not hold the pen to finish the sentence, but left Matilda and Isabella talking in the middle of a paragraph.

One is irresistibly reminded of the 'confounded hand' which 'bothered' Lockhart's friend, who was the unwilling witness of its nocturnal industry from that window in George Street, Edinburgh, which overlooked the back of Walter Scott's house in North Castle Street!

It is hardly a hyperbole to say that if Horace Walpole had never dreamed that dream Walter Scott would never have written any of his medieval romances either in prose or in verse. For ballad-narratives Scott had been prepared by his study of Bürger and his intimate knowledge of the minstrelsy of his own beloved Border; but neither Mrs. Radcliffe nor Monk Lewis, unaided or together, could have set his feet upon the medieval track—and, in any case, *Udolpho* and *The Monk* were themselves inspired by *Otranto*.

Try to imagine what the prospects of the English Romantic Revival would have been, along what lines and at what a rate of speed it would have moved, if Horace Walpole's active and excited co-operation had not reinforced the efforts of such men as Bishop Percy and Thomas Gray. The English movement away from form and towards colour, away from classicism and towards medievalism, away from the Palladian and towards the Gothic, would no doubt have taken place without any intervention on his part. It was too big and too deep a movement to be begun or carried forward by any one man or group of men, working in any single medium. It was aesthetic as well as literary, architectural as well as antiquarian. The excess to which Augustan classicism had been pushed made reaction inevitable, and these were the channels which the reflux would naturally find. But what is memorable and significant, especially in relation to the evolution of Scott's genius, is the fact that Walpole first of all mortal men (and Englishmen) should have produced something in the nature of an historical romance *in prose*. As Scott himself wrote:

> The *Castle of Otranto* is remarkable, not only for the wild interest of the story, but as the first modern attempt to found a tale of amusing fiction upon the basis of the ancient romances of chivalry.

'Amusing' is perhaps hardly the word we should choose if compelled to find an appropriate epithet, though it is less wide of the mark than 'snug', which Mr. Loundes, the bookseller, in conversation with Fanny Burney, applied to the same story. Walpole failed, inevitably, characteristically, hopelessly, in this 'first modern attempt'. That he should have failed matters little; the important point is that the attempt was made, and by him. Few people in these days have the leisure or the inclination to read *The Castle of Otranto, cum pietate et gravitate*, from beginning to end; but I venture to think that of these few there will be fewer yet who are not reminded irresistibly of the weaker and more self-conscious parts of Walter Scott. Walpole's waiting-women have something of the pertness, the not unpleasing pertness, of Shakespeare's and Molière's; but his two heroines, Matilda and Isabella, are such stuff as Rowenas—if not Rebeccas—are made of; and his Calabrian knights and warriors, his Manfred and Alfonso, his monks and hermits, bear a strong family resemblance to Scott's heroes and villains. For it is a little curious to realize that Scott nearly always lost his grip when depicting extremes of virtue and vice. Modern novelists, and modern readers, prefer a nicely adjusted balance between these extremes—the villain, if any, must have some

engaging traits; the hero, if *any*, must have a dash of the devil about him or nobody will be interested in his fate. The earlier romancers had to keep to sharp and distinct lines of demarcation, and they thus imposed upon themselves a test which it was impossible that they should not sometimes fail to pass. Scott is certainly happiest—as we are happiest—when he is dealing with quaint or uncouth, simple or homely characters who have nothing, or very little, to do with the plot, and whose function is neither to edify nor to appal, but merely to give an outlet to his genius at its freshest and best. Thus we see that neither Dirk Hatteraick nor Vanbeest Brown is as life-like a figure as Dandie Dinmont; neither young Neville nor old Dousterswivel as vivid as Edie Ochiltree. It is, of course, impossible to imagine Horace Walpole introducing types such as these to enliven his mock-medievalism. He was groping after a totally new technique, and, although he squared up valiantly to Voltaire in defence of the humorous interpolations in Shakespeare's tragedies, it does not seem to have struck him that a touch of comic relief might not have come amiss amid the splendours and terrors of *Otranto*. Let us be grateful that it did *not* strike him; he was too fastidious, superficial, and finical to have done the thing well. Scott knew—no man better—how to combine heroic highfalutin with sturdy realism; it was this knowledge which enabled him to employ both methods in a single work of art without any sacrifice of artistic unity; and it enabled him to do this as it had been done by no other English writer since Shakespeare. I say 'English', not 'British', for, passionate patriot though Sir Walter was, and royally though he enriched the vernacular literature of Scotland, it seems to me that he deserves—as he would certainly have *desired*—to be ranked among the English immortals. Not only did the Tory and Episcopalian elements in him respond instinctively to English influences: he had an appreciation of the natural beauty of England and of the charm of the English character not commonly found among his countrymen, and, when found, not commonly acknowledged or made articulate!

Scott's debt to Walpole was like Shakespeare's to Marlowe. In each instance something was done for the first time by one writer, and done well; and then done for the second time by another, and done better. The relationship of the two men was not in either case the relationship of pupil to master or copyist to originator: it was rather that of follower to pioneer. Scott himself, who admired *Otranto* with an ardour of admiration not easy for us to understand to-day, would have desired that the debt should be acknowledged now.

Nor is it in his novels and narrative poems alone that Sir Walter is Mr. Walpole's debtor. In his chapter-headings, his snatches from imaginary Old Plays, he often recreates that strange atmosphere which English readers breathed first in the haunted halls of *Otranto*—an atmosphere compounded partly of the genuine aroma of rust, mould, and moss, and partly of the reek of lamps, sawdust, and painted canvas. Indeed, the heading of Chapter Three of *Quentin Durward* might stand as a description of Walpole's famous fortalice itself:

> Full in the midst a mighty pile arose
> Where iron-grated gates their strength oppose
> To each invading step; and strong and steep
> The 'battled walls sprung up, the fosse sank deep.

One more point of resemblance may be noted between the Laird of Abbotsford and the Lord of Strawberry Hill: they both drew nearest to the upper peaks of poetry when, discarding what the greater of the two called the Big Bow Wow manner, they employed the lyric form at its purest and most simple. It is hardly surprising that Scott should have caught so often the authentic pang and throb of the ancient ballad rhythms—rhythms to which from childhood the pulses of his mind had moved; but whence did he catch cadences so lovely as those of *Brignal Banks*, or *Proud Maisie*, or *He is gone on the Mountain*, or that magical fragment of Madge Wildfire's

> When the glede's in the blue cloud
> The lavrock lies still;
> When the hound's in the greenwood
> The hind keeps the hill . . . ?

And the most unexpected—as it is the most infrequent—of his poetical achievements is his escape into that poetical fourth dimension to which belong Ophelia's babblings, and Herrick's *Mad Maid's Song*, and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *Goblin Market*. When he *does* invade that eerie plane he produces something almost unearthly in its fusion of the macabre, the pathetic and the whimsical: such for example as:

> In the bonnie cells of Bedlam
> Ere I was ane and twenty
> I had hempen bracelets strong,
> And merry whips ding-dong,
> And prayer and fasting plenty.

Observe how the abrupt introduction of the two homely Scots words 'bonny' and 'ane' puts a keener edge to the pathos: they are,

like Othello's 'cold, cold, my girl', touches that, by their seeming incongruity, heighten the effects of pity and pain.

It is easy—indeed, it is dangerously easy—to smile at Scott in his Big Bow Wow mood. It is easy—so easy as hardly to be worth the doing—to parody his lumbering couplets, his grandiose apostrophes, his sententious asides. If he had left us nothing better than these we might endorse Byron's gibe at the 'hireling bard', 'Apollo's venal Son'. We must not ask of him the

> terrible and quick drum-taps
> That seem the anguished beat of our own heart
> Making an endless battle without hope
> Against materialism and the world,

for we should ask in vain. All we can ask, all he can give, is speed, strength, poignancy, and colour; and these are much.

Walter Scott has recently faced that sudden violent floodlighting which we concentrate upon all our great men who have been dead for just a hundred years—a method which by its over-emphasis can distort as well as illuminate. It is not a slight matter to see him steadily and see him whole; he is too big, and we are still a little too near. Also, it can hardly be gainsaid that in some ways he is more out of touch with us than Shakespeare or than Chaucer. Few centenaries of late years have imposed a heavier strain upon the critical fraternity, especially those members of it who are temperamentally out of accord with a man like Scott, a man whom they deride if they cannot disregard. Yet he persists—to their faint exasperation—in remaining *there*. They cannot black him out or knock him down. Might they not do well to remember that while a large and solid target is the easiest to hit, it is at the same time the most difficult to overthrow?

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THE CASE OF CHRISTOPHER SMART

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THE CASE OF CHRISTOPHER SMART

IN the days of my boyhood I nourished a fervent admiration for the poetry of Robert Browning, whose latest volumes were then still appearing at fairly frequent intervals. I remember eagerly reading when it first came out the volume called *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day* and trying or pretending to get more pleasure out of it than it actually gave me. The book is now, I fancy, wellnigh forgotten, and if remembered it is chiefly for the sake of Christopher Smart, who is the subject of one of the parleyings. Browning delighted to recite in his loud, sonorous voice stanzas of the *Song to David*, and the enthusiasm which he communicated to others was in some measure the means of rescuing from oblivion a poem which was not included in the author's collected verse, and which till comparatively lately was difficult to procure. After reading the *Parleyings* I was naturally most eager to read the *Song*, but for many years all I could discover of it was the two stanzas which Palgrave extracted from it and printed in his *Golden Treasury*.

The life and the work of Smart present a problem; just the kind of problem which made a particular appeal to the casuist in Browning, always pre-occupied with the human soul, always seeking to follow it into its obscure recesses and illuminate its dark and secret workings. Smart was a case of fascinating interest.

Here was a man who in the eyes of the world cut no reputable figure. He had few of the social virtues; he was shiftless, incompetent to manage his affairs, often in debt, a drunkard, vain, given to lying, not over-clean in his person; and worse than these infirmities in the eyes of the eighteenth century was his 'enthusiasm'. What more shocking to society than the spectacle of this eccentric and ill-dressed creature suddenly stopping in the Strand to kneel on the pavement and passionately say his prayers? For if not shining in morality, he was fundamentally religious. Such mixtures and contrasts in the strangeness of our human nature are not uncommon. A poet of our time, Verlaine, provides something of a parallel; a spontaneously immoral yet religious nature. But in their work there is a remarkable difference. Verlaine was always an exquisite and highly original writer. Smart on the contrary was as a poet not more than mediocre. He conformed to the taste of his time; he had a certain ingenuity, a rhetorical gift, which gave him what reputation he enjoyed in his lifetime; but except for an occasional line or stanza he wrote nothing of

enduring power except the one poem, the *Song to David*, which he composed in the madhouse where for a period he was confined. In that poem he appears as a different being. He has escaped from his century, he breathes another air. His poetic stature is incredibly heightened, his powers indefinitely enlarged.

What can explain this extraordinary phenomenon?

Browning, after his manner, argues the matter back and forth, in what I cannot help thinking now to be rather indifferent verse. You may remember how he professed to have dreamed that he was exploring some huge house, had gone

> Through room and room complacently, no dearth
> Anywhere of the signs of decent taste,
> Adequate culture,

then suddenly pushing open a door found himself in the Chapel,

> from floor to roof one evidence
> Of how far earth may rival heaven, no niche
> Where glory was not prismed to enrich
> Man's gaze with gold and gems.

Full of wonder and anticipation he passes on to the rest of the house, only to find 'calm commonplace', as before. He goes on to surmise of Smart

> The man was sound
> And sane at starting: all at once the ground
> Gave way beneath his step, a certain smoke
> Curled up and caught him, or perhaps down broke
> A fire-ball wrapping flesh and spirit both
> In conflagration. Then as heaven were loth
> To linger . . . off fell
> The flame-robe and the untransfigured man
> Resumed sobriety.
> How came you (he asks) to resume the void and null?
> . . . . . .
> What if in one point only, then and there,
> The otherwise all-unapproachable
> Allowed impingement?

So far as I can understand the argument, Browning appears to decide that the poem came in a moment of transcendent illumination; and though willing to concede that the marvel may have come to pass

> The way folk judged, if power too long suppressed
> Broke loose and maddened, as the vulgar guessed,

what specially puzzles him is the fact that Smart having just once proved himself capable of splendid poetry was entirely unable to repeat his achievement. It seems to me that this is less remarkable than that such a poetic power should have remained dormant

and apparently non-existent through the greater part of the poet's life. We know how the pious editor of Smart's collected poems omitted the *Song to David*, as 'affording melancholy proofs of the estrangement of the poet's mind'. On the other hand, Mr. Blunden has unearthed an advertisement printed by the publisher of the first edition of the *Song*, according to which 'this song was allowed by Mr. Smart's judicious friends and enemies to be the best piece ever made public by him; its chief fault being the exact regularity and method with which it is conducted'. In fact when we read the Argument prefixed to the poem, there seems to be some justification for this last criticism. Let me quote from it:

> The excellence and lustre of David's character in twelve points of view. The subjects he made choice of—the Supreme Being, angels, men of renown; the works of nature in all directions, either particularly or collectively considered.—An exercise upon the Decalogue. The transcendent virtues of praise and adoration. An exercise upon the seasons and the right use of them. An exercise upon the senses and how to subdue them. An amplification in five degrees which is wrought up to this conclusion that the best poet which every lived was thought worthy of the highest honour which possibly can be conceived.

Can we not imagine the Rev. Christopher Hunter reading this analysis with complete approval, and anticipating in the poem so prefaced an essay in verse on the accepted eighteenth-century model, not different in style or substance from the poems on the attributes of the Supreme Being which had won for Smart his reputation at Cambridge and which were thought to reflect so much honour on his college? But when he came to the *Song* itself, how disconcerting to find such regrettable 'enthusiasm', such licence of expression, such odd syntax, such obscure allusions; verse, in short, so thoroughly incorrect.

Yet these characteristics, however unlooked for in 1763, hardly amount to 'estrangement of mind': and one would like to know what exactly were the 'melancholy proofs' which so alarmed Mr. Hunter. No doubt his taste was offended; but I surmise that what seemed to him signs of madness were the often inconsequent succession of images, the strange collocations, and the abrupt transitions. Such a stanza as this, for example:

> Open and naked of offence,
> Man 's made of mercy, soul, and sense.
> God armed the snail and wilk.
> Be good to him that pulls thy plough;
> Due food and care, due rest allow
> For her that yields thee milk.

Indeed, what gives the poem its peculiar character is this; that while the plan of it is methodical and deliberate, the general effect is one of excitement and a certain incoherence, like the sudden shiftings of a kaleidoscope.

If we analyse the poem, the life goes out of it: 'we murder to dissect.' In the Argument, which no doubt was composed afterwards but which does give the matter of the poem, Reason appears all too much in control. But in the poem itself what are analysed as sections seem to disappear under the spontaneous rush and glow which unify them all. There is a sense of continuous mounting movement, as of an upward spiral, culminating in the superb close. The abrupt transitions now seem as if they were the effect of a singer pausing to take breath before attacking the next theme in his mind, by no means of the essayist pausing after making one point before he passes to the next. And again the strange collocations seem the perfectly natural result of a mind so overbrimming with the glories of the world, so filled with images rushing in from near and far, that it cannot stop to order them in detail, it must harvest them in their vivid freshness, at whatever cost. We seem worlds away from exercises on the Decalogue, exercises on the seasons, and on the senses.

The theme of the poem is King David, but under the ostensible theme, overflowing and inundating it, is the more general motive of the Benedicite: 'O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.'

> Praise above all—for praise prevails.
> Heap up the measure, load the scales
> And good to goodness add.

It is in the stanzas following this, the stanzas on Adoration, that Smart shows himself farthest from his own time. There is no veil between our eyes and the thing seen. It is a scented and coloured profusion.

> For Adoration seasons change,
> And order, truth, and beauty range,
> Adjust, attract, and fill;
> The grass the polyanthus cheques;
> And polish'd porphyry reflects
> By the descending rill.
>
> Rich almonds colour to the prime
> For Adoration; tendrils climb
> And fruit-trees pledge their gems;
> And Iris with her gorgeous vest
> Builds for her eggs her cunning nest,
> And bell-flowers bow their stems.

With vinous syrup cedars spout;
From rocks pure honey gushing out
For Adoration springs;
All scenes of painting crowd the map
Of nature; to the mermaid's pap
The scaled infant clings.

The spotted ounce and playsome cubs
Run rustling 'mongst the flowering shrubs
And lizards feed the moss.
For Adoration beasts embark,
While waves upholding halcyon's ark
No longer roar and toss.

. . . . . .

Now labour his reward receives,
For Adoration counts his sheaves
To peace, her beauteous prince;
The nectarine his strong tint imbibes
And apples of ten thousand tribes
And quick peculiar quince.

The wealthy crops of whitening rice
'Mongst thyine woods and groves of spice
For Adoration grow;
And marshalled in the fenced land
The peaches and pomegranates stand
Where wild carnations blow.

The laurels with the winter strive;
The crocus burnishes alive
Upon the snow-clad earth.
For Adoration myrtles stay
To keep the garden from dismay
And bless the sight from dearth.

We note for one thing a freshness in the rhyme-sounds. The school of Pope preferred common rhymes to rare ones. These fresh rhymes add a stimulating crispness to the verse. The rhythm is plain and without subtleties. The stanza indeed does not lend itself to subtle rhythm; that is not in its character. But the poem, with all its sudden transitions, has such momentum that it seems to gather speed as it goes, and one cannot think of another form of stanza which would better carry the theme. Then we note on the pictorial side a freshness also of vision. The taste of the time to which Smart hitherto had conformed, rejoiced in generalization; it was soaked in Latinism; lines like

Here blushing Flora paints the enamelled ground

were thought to have the true ring of poetry. A certain remove from the direct picturing of things seen was preferred and prescribed.

It is true that Thomson's *Seasons*, with their elaborate descriptions of landscape, had introduced a different mode. Thomson's 'yellow wall-flowers, stained an iron-brown' bring the object before the eye. But we feel at once a difference between such minuteness of observation and Smart's

> The crocus burnishes alive
> Upon the snow-clad earth.

This is not merely observation, it is illumination. We not only see but we feel the life of the flower; it makes a glory in the mind. And that is above all what the poem communicates; the glory of the world, an intoxication of the senses, never separated from, always penetrated by, an intoxication of the soul with the idea of the Creator. It is this profound feeling of unity in the whole creation which fuses together the less coherent elements of the poem as in a flaming glow. And the suddenness with which the images are projected evokes the prodigality of Nature as no logical sequence could.

There is no doubt in the *Song* a certain wildness such as is popularly associated with insanity. Yet actually Smart's madness seems to have taken the form of a literal interpretation of the injunction *Pray without ceasing*. He embarrassed visitors by insisting on their joining him in his supplications. Dr. Johnson had the lowest opinion of the verse Smart wrote in his sanity—we don't know his opinion of the *Song*. Asked whether Smart or Derrick was the better poet, 'Sir,' he replied, 'there is no settling the point of precedency between a louse and a flea.' But his human sympathies were large; he liked the man. 'I would as lief pray with Kit Smart,' he said, 'as with any one else.'

Obsession with a fixed idea is a common form of insanity. But such obsessions are a mental imprisonment; whereas the *Song* is unmistakably the expression of a great release. I speak as a mere layman in these matters, but it seems to me that, while there is nothing in the poem to betray an insane mind—no confusion of the real with the unreal—the mental disturbance must somehow have indirectly affected Smart by shaking him out of his normal self, so that for the time he was freed from the inhibitions which had dominated till then his creative impulses.

For the *Song* is spontaneous, it manifestly flows from the inner core and genius of the man. In his madhouse cell he was alone

with himself and the God of his adoration. He was enabled to cast off the contemporary mode, and his accustomed methods of composition. The verse gushes forth with all the impetus of a liberated stream.

Let us try to realize what it meant in the mid-eighteenth century to revolt from the authority of the time. That is extremely difficult in an age like ours, when everything is questioned and no authority accepted. Then there was, on the contrary, an apparently universal conformity with the accepted canons of taste and style. Let us try to realize a time when a phrase like

> Sequacious of the lyre

gave readers of poetry an extraordinary pleasure; a time when such a picture as

> to the mermaid's pap
> The scaled infant clings

was probably as affronting to taste as a pre-Raphaelite painting thrust before the eyes of Reynolds and his circle.

The vividness and freshness of the imagery delight us in the *Song*; but they would give no special pleasure to orthodox contemporary taste. And the whole mood of the poem, the kind of mood which inspired

> Use all thy passions! love is thine
> And joy, and jealousy divine

and

> Precious the bounteous widow's mite
> And precious for extreme delight
> The largess from the churl

would have seemed to savour of intemperance, of an extravagant and regrettable enthusiasm.

Smart, as I said, was in his time of insanity thrown back upon himself. I imagine that he had no thought of a public in his mind; at any rate he had no care to propitiate his usual public and comply with its demands. Had he then been suppressing all his life a spring of poetry native to himself and independent of the taste of his own day? Is it possible to find any clue in his life or his earlier verse?

Born prematurely, he was a delicate child and debarred from the normal activities of boyhood. At the age of four, according to his biographer, he produced 'an extraordinary effusion'. This has not been preserved; but at thirteen he wrote some verses, 'To Ethelinda, on her doing my verses the honour of wearing them in her bosom'; verses of a precociously amorous strain.

Possibly still earlier—at least it is put first in his collected work—is a little 'Ode to Idleness'.

> Sister of Peace and Indolence,
> Bring, Muse, bring numbers soft and slow
> Elaborately void of sense,
> And sweetly thoughtless let them flow.

Elaborately void of sense! We recall that typical couplet of the Age of Reason

> Others to some faint meaning make pretence
> But Shadwell never deviates into sense,

And we wonder at this strange aspiration. Are we hearing already from the depth of the eighteenth century the voice of Miss Gertrude Stein? Is Smart aspiring, in our modern phrase, to exploit the subconscious, to make of poetry an incantation, lulling the logical processes of thought to sleep? Nothing seems to come of it; it is just a hint, and I suppose we must not make too much of it. Still, it is remarkable, and would seem much more so if the phrasing were not so entirely of the time.

Other poets whose temperament could find no satisfying mode of expression in the Popian couplet turned instinctively to earlier models, as Blake for instance was to turn to the songs of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Blake, however, had the advantage of coming into the world a whole generation later.

Smart was born in Kent, in April 1722. He was sent to school at Durham; but some early association of his boyhood, perhaps a visit to Penshurst, kept before him the image of Philip Sidney, and he seems at one time to have been intoxicated with the romantic atmosphere of the 'Arcadia'. But whatever he may have read of Elizabethan romance and poetry has not affected the texture of his verse, as they affected the boyish poems of Blake, and later of Keats. Here is a passage from a pastoral called 'The Noon Piece, or Mowers at Dinner':

> Or where coy Daphne's thickest shade
> Drives amorous Phœbus from the glade
> There read Sydney's high-wrought stories
> Of ladies' charms and heroes' glories;
> Thence fired, the sweet narration act
> And kiss the fiction into fact.

One feels the gusto of satisfaction with which Smart wrote that last line. It has the epigrammatic turn, the making of a point, which Smart's contemporaries enjoyed as something essential to poetry.

Another little piece may detain us a moment—it is called a fable. Smart pictures Imagination wooing Reason. She comes to Reason's little cottage

> Before, a river deep and still;
> Behind, a rocky soaring hill.

'You dwell alone,' she cries, 'and are too grave.' And she hints that these solitary studies pursued too far will lead to madness.

> The Doctors soon will find a flaw
> And lock you up in chains and straw.

Excess of reason, you will note, not excess of imagination, will lead to madness. Here again is something to arrest us in a poem of that period. I think of Blake's design in *Jerusalem*, where Imagination looks with pity and horror at the man of Reason in torment. In Smart's poem Reason is invited

> To those bright plains where crowd in swarms
> The spirits of fantastic forms,
> To natures still above themselves.
> I'll bring you to the pearly cars
> By dragons drawn above the stars,
> To colours of Arabian glow
> And to the heart-dilating show
> Of paintings which surmount the life.

But Reason, while consenting to be Imagination's 'correspondent and ally', refused the proffered marriage:

> I cannot take thee for a mate.
> I'm lost if e'er I change my state.

What was in Smart's mind when he composed this fable, whether he had any fears already for his own sanity, how significant it is, I do not feel able to divine. Certainly there is no note of lived experience such as sounds in a line which Wordsworth might have written and which occurs in a poem composed on recovering from a dangerous illness,

> My mind lay open to the powers of Night.

This poem was written in 1756, just after the series of poems on the Eternity, the Immensity, the Omniscience, and the Goodness of the Supreme Being, which won in almost successive years the Seatonian Prize at Cambridge. These compositions are not at all remarkable as poetry, but they helped perhaps to deepen the channel of Smart's thoughts and caused him to be more pre-occupied than ever with the relation of the human soul to God.

We do not find then much to throw light on Smart's interior mind in his other works; there are hints of poetic sensibility; but

there is nothing to show that he was in any sense a conscious rebel against the literary conventions of his own day.

At the same time that Smart was writing the *Song*, a boy of genius in Bristol was seeking to find a medium of expression in poetry which would satisfy his instincts as the current poetic medium could not satisfy them. Rummaging among antique documents gave him a hint. He found there language still in a fluid state, not yet fixed; a world of richer colour than his own age; words and phrases, the meaning of which he could only surmise but which were all the more exciting to imagination on that account; and he was fired with an idea. Here was a means of escape from his own century, with its formal taste and imposed conventions. So Chatterton, who could write deft satirical verse in the fashionable style, became a poet only when he put on a medieval disguise.

Smart had no such taste for medieval things. For him, as for his contemporaries, Gothic meant barbarous. As a writer he was nurtured on the Bible, Milton, and the classics; and among the classics chiefly on Horace. He accepted in fact the limitations of the traditional public-school and university education in England. He translated Horace; and in the preface to his verse translation there is a passage pointed out by Mr. Blunden which is almost the only evidence of Smart's interest in the technique of poetry. 'Besides the Curiosa Felicitas', he says, 'there is another poetical excellence: I mean the beauty, force, and vehemence of Impression . . . a talent or gift of Almighty God, by which a Genius is empowered to throw an emphasis upon a word or sentence in such wise that it cannot escape any reader of sheer good sense and critical sagacity.'

It would be interesting to know how Smart would have illustrated this observation, for his language is not very precise. Was he perhaps thinking of Horace's wonderful sense of the value of *position*, of the way in which a word may acquire from its position in a stanza a strangely heightened power? And yet there is something in the words 'beauty, force, and vehemence' which seems to be less an Horatian quality than a quality personal to Smart himself when he wrote the *Song to David*. Horace is, I think, an influence in the *Song*; the close packing of the Horatian stanzas necessitates a pregnant concision, a juxtaposition of images with no elaboration of logical sequence and connexion; and the attempt to achieve like effects appears in the *Song*, though with little of the Latin poet's consummate art.

Please do not think that I am trying to explain the genesis of the *Song to David* by the literary influences which may have

affected its author. We can see a certain influence from Horace, and possibly from Milton in such stanzas as

> The world—the clustering spheres he made,
> The glorious light, the soothing shade,
> Dale, champaign, grove and hill;
> The multitudinous abyss
> Where secrecy remains in bliss
> And wisdom hides her skill.

But, after all, how little this amounts to!

What I am trying to discover is the furniture of Smart's mind. For however inspired a poet may be, he is limited by his own experience, by what he has seen and heard and felt, and by what he has read and consciously or unconsciously remembered. Nothing is more striking in Smart's poem than the wide range of his picturing fancy. His mind roams the world and brings back vivid images. Actually Smart was an untravelled man; Cambridge and London were all he knew in adult life, though he had passed through England in his school-days. He would have seen the crocus 'burnishing alive' in a snow-clad English garden; and in July had smelt the blossom when the dew 'drops upon the leafy limes'. He had noted in the lengthening days of spring the 'pink and mottled vault' of the sky. These came from direct observation. But sugar-canes and pine-apples and coco-nuts, ostriches and sword-fish, porphyry and humming-birds; where do these come from? Smart seems to have been as avid of travel-books as Coleridge. They called up vivid pictures in his mind, and these in his mad-house came thronging to him from all the countries in the world. The mermaid with her scaled infant is there, I fancy, because Smart had pored some day on one of those old maps in which the wind-gods blow from the four quarters and mermaids rise from the ocean waves. Obscure facts from books on natural history have lodged in his memory like seeds and spring up into blossom in the *Song*.

Smart had naturally fine senses, keen to appreciate beauty in every form. It is manifest throughout the stanzas of the *Song*. His delight in colour and intimate detail is specially remarkable. Even in the paraphrase of the Psalms we find occasional stanzas not unworthy of the *Song* itself; this, for example, from the 114th Psalm.

> Near them through blossoms bursting ripe
> The birds upon the perches pipe,
> As boughs the herbage shield;
> And while each other they salute
> The trees from every quivering shoot
> Melodious music yield

though in the *Song* there is a more intimate picture where

> The scholar bulfinch aims to catch
> The soft flute's ivory touch.

The colours glowing in plumage or fur, or radiating from precious stones, had caused Smart an intensity of pleasure. These minuter splendours alternate with pictures of delighted movement—the speed of horse and ostrich—and evocations of great horizons, as in

> Beauteous the fleet before the gale

rising at last into sublimity:

> Glorious the sun in mid career,
> Glorious the assembled fires appear,
> Glorious the comet's train:
> Glorious the trumpet and alarm,
> Glorious the Almighty's stretcht-out arm;
> Glorious the enraptured main.

But it is above all the expression of joy in the senses that sets the *Song* apart from the poetry of his time; a sensuousness which must have been inherent in Smart's nature, but which for so many years had been suppressed under the despotism of eighteenth-century taste. Only madness, it seems, could release it.

For Smart in the days of his sanity was of an acquiescent mind. In his religion, for all his enthusiasm, he was completely orthodox, and in literary taste he conformed to the canons he found prevailing among his contemporaries. He was utterly unlike Blake in this respect; for Blake was a visionary and a rebel from the first. So we come to the question: Does poetry need a kind of madness for its liberation? Is the case of Christopher Smart only an extreme instance of what happens at the birth of all fine poetry?

In any case, however it was brought about, we may feel certain that Smart when he composed the *Song* was in what is for poets the propitious state. The faculties which we use in dealing with the ordinary affairs of existence, the logical processes of thought by which we deal with more abstract problems, both are in abeyance; a state of acutely heightened sensibility supervenes: the surface of life seems to be sponged away; we are aware of something welling up within us from some unknown source.

You may remember the words of the poet in *Timon of Athens*. A painter accosts him:

> You are rapt, Sir, in some work, some dedication
> To the great lord.

and he answers:

A thing slipt idly from me.
Our poesy is as a gum, which oozes
From whence 'tis nourished.

Poetry appears, then, to be a kind of secretion. But what is it that stimulates its flow? That is something which no one can predict. It may be a sight, a sound, a scent; it may be the haunting rhythm of a phrase; probably with each individual poet it tends to be something different and peculiar to himself. An unusual physical condition may predispose to what I have called the propitious state. It may be induced, we have recently been told, by the drinking of a pot of beer; and wine has been found by some to be a favouring influence, though Shelley needed nothing more exciting than water. *Kubla Khan* is a classic instance of a marvellous poem composed in a dream after Coleridge had taken two drops of opium. It is not so well known that Crabbe took opium to relieve the troubles of his digestion; and I think the stimulus of the drug can be seen in the visions of *Sir Eustace Grey*. I would like to dwell for a moment on that remarkable and too little known poem, because it provides a kind of distant parallel to the case of Smart. Crabbe was a realist, a recorder, an observer; he wrote with his eye on the object. He was capable of touches of imaginative insight; but normally his poetic powers were under conscious control. In this poem, however, he describes a visit to the madhouse in which Sir Eustace Grey is confined; and in a tranquil interval the unfortunate man recounts the hallucinations which have tormented him. Crabbe was taking opium at the time when this poem was composed. I suggest that his opium dreams had powerfully impressed themselves on his mind, and that, wishing to embody them in a poem, he conceived the idea of a poem about a madman which would give him the opportunity desired.

At any rate there is in the central stanzas of *Sir Eustace Grey* an element which surprises us. Something in Crabbe's mind seems to be released which is not in his normal verse.

The madman describes how he comes into the power of two fiends who lead him out into strange regions where Time has ceased.

There was I fixed, I know not how,
Condemned for unknown years to stay;
Yet years were not; one dreadful Now
Endured no change of night or day;
The same mild evening's sleeping ray
Shone softly solemn and serene,
And all that time I gazed away
The setting sun's sad rays were seen.

At length a moment's sleep stole on.
Again came my commissioned foes;
Again through sea and land we're gone,
No peace, no respite, no repose;
Above the dark broad sea we rose,
We ran through bleak and frozen land;
I had no strength their strength to oppose,
An infant in a giant's hand.

They placed me where those streamers play,
Those nimble beams of brilliant light;
It would the stoutest heart dismay
To see, to feel, that dreadful sight:
So swift, so pure, so cold, so bright,
They pierced my frame with icy wound,
And all that half-year's polar night
Those dancing streamers wrapt me round.

I spoke just now of the propitious, the desirable state, the state in which everything perceived by the senses comes to us with an extraordinary glow and vividness; in which words seem living things with the bloom and mystery of flowers. But it is possible to pass into this state and yet for nothing to come of it. It remains impalpable and does not crystallize into form.

The poet in *Timon* compares poetry to an oozing gum; but immediately afterwards, changing the metaphor, he says

the fire i' the flint
Shows not till it be struck.

And this is also true. It is only when the ideal form or ideal subject presents itself as a vessel into which the ferment of thought and feeling is to be poured, that the poem comes about. I suppose Crabbe to have consciously sought out a subject into which he could introduce the nightmare visions he had experienced. Smart, much less deliberately, I expect, found the perfect subject to embody his state of ecstasy. The story of David had long possessed his imagination. He had made a close study of the Psalms. The subject of David playing to Saul had once been suggested to him by a Cambridge friend, but he had been deterred by the greatness of the theme. Was it not Smart's *Song* which suggested to Browning in the succeeding century his own fine poem *Saul*?

So when in his state of ecstasy he was filled with a sense of the glory of creation and the greater glory of the Creator, David the Singer came spontaneously before him to give body and shape to his exaltation and emotion. Here was a theme into which he could

pour all his inner experience. Glimpses of beauty seen for a moment and treasured in the memory; the colours of the dawn, the splendour of a flower, the gleam of goldfish in water, the song of a bullfinch—a hundred images evoked by pages of books read long ago, emotions of gratitude and affection welling up from the past—all these thronged pell-mell into Smart's mind, to mingle with reminiscences of Horace, of Milton, and above all the Psalms, and were submerged in 'the beauty, force, and vehemence' (to use his own words) of a single overwhelming inspiration.

In the memoir of Smart his editor tells how he would spring from his bed to write down, before he forgot it, some phrase or image that had come to him; perhaps one of those waking visions which are apt to visit the mind before the body falls asleep; the kind of visions which Blake accepted as having the authority of reality, but which to most poets are welcome for the hints and evocations they supply. The legend that Smart scratched the *Song to David* with a key on the walls of his asylum cell may well have this foundation, that he would scribble lines he wished to remember on the wall when he had no paper handy.

Smart was no doubt in our modern phrase exploiting the unconscious in himself. But he was quite unaware that he was doing it. And this was to his great advantage.

Poetry appeals to something very deep in our nature, far deeper than our ordinary, everyday consciousness. And if it is to make its full appeal, it must come from a corresponding depth in the poet's nature. I think I read somewhere the other day that the creation of poetry is just a successful attempt to tap the unconscious self. But to try to turn on the tap, with an acutely self-conscious effort, only perhaps to uncover a mess of arbitrary images and impulses, is not, it seems to me, the way to work.

I remember once dreaming that I had discovered an unknown essay of Charles Lamb's. I read it in my dream with delight, thinking all the time of the pleasure I should share with friends and the excitement it would cause in the world of letters. Another time I came in a dream upon an unknown sonnet of Milton's. What these compositions were really like, I cannot say; for when I woke nothing but a stray phrase or two remained in my memory. But here was one part of my brain enthusiastically admiring as something completely fresh what another part (I suppose) of the same brain was simultaneously composing on its own account. Such experiences are, I dare say, common enough. But when I think of such mysterious goings-on within oneself and such subtle powers of self-deception, doesn't the introduction of the conscious

mind into these obscure depths seem like the plunging of a great clumsy hand into an inconceivably delicate machinery?

Mr. A. E. Housman, in the lecture he gave last year at Cambridge, said: 'That the intellect is not the fount of poetry, that it may actually hinder its production . . . is best seen in the case of Smart.' I was reminded of this when in reading a recent book on Walt Whitman's unpublished manuscripts I came upon Whitman's exclamation: 'Intellect is a fiend'; and in another place he counsels the poet when engendering a poem, 'Veil thy strong perceptions. Musing, retire within thyself.'

It may seem incongruous to cite Whitman in connexion with Smart, but there is a point of affinity between them. There was a strong mystical element in Whitman; he even practised an art of meditation to induce the propitious state. He professed himself unable to explain his own writings. The preliminary to creation was for him 'a trance, yet with all the senses alert'.

Smart was not, precisely speaking, a mystic. His God was a transcendent God, outside the universe. He does not deal in symbols. Yet I wonder, if he had been born at a different time and under other influences, whether he would not have found that he was a mystic. I have spoken of his sensuousness as giving the *Song to David* a place apart in the eighteenth century. But this joy of the senses is in the *Song* drenched in religious feeling, in the mood of adoration. And in that mood he sees everything in nature glowing and distinct, as it glows in the mystic's vision.

We have seen how Smart in one of his earlier poems conceived of Reason and Imagination as two separate powers of the mind, which could help each other but never unite in marriage. But surely in the great poems of the world there is this marriage; and perhaps the defect of the *Song to David* is that the union is imperfect. In the eighteenth century it was a general belief that works of art could be produced by observing rules discoverable by reason. Dr. Johnson dismissed as a fantastic foppery Gray's profession of inability to write except at certain times or at happy moments. I am sure, however, that we shall all agree with Mr. Housman when he says that the intellect is not the fount of poetry.

No effort of intellect will ever produce what I have called the propitious state. But Mr. Housman goes on to push his doctrine farther than I can follow. 'It is not what is said but the way it is said that matters.' At first one is inclined to a ready assent. But then a doubt arises: is this the whole of the truth? The phrasing suggests an antithesis, suggests that the form can be separated from the substance, that what is said is one thing and the way it is said

another. And other expressions of Mr. Housman's—'poetry neat', poetry 'adulterated with meaning'; and the remark about Blake's songs, 'the meaning is a poor foolish disappointing thing in comparison with the verses themselves'—these provoke in my mind something more than doubt.

For what is the meaning of a poem? It is not, I submit, the idea or the emotion we extract from it, it is nothing less than the poem itself in its achieved form. Blake's lyrics could not be what they are without that peculiar outlook on the world which is behind them, and this gives an edge and force to the expression, even when it is not explicit on the surface.

I may be misinterpreting Mr. Housman, but he seems to me to imply that intellect supplies the meaning of a poem and that some other faculty supplies the form or expression, and that only the last has any poetic value. But how can we disentangle the faculties that are at work in the creation of a poem? If the initial prompting come from a thought, the thought will be suffused by emotion, it will attract to itself a clothing of imagery, or no poem will result. If the poem starts with an emotion or merely with a rhythm, the shaping faculty will seize on these and transform them, and who shall say that the working of the intellect is not present?

It is all surely a question of fusion. When a poem appeals merely or mainly to the intelligence, it is a proof that there is an unfused element in it and by so much it fails to be poetry. The appeal, in my view, is not to any single sensibility, but to the whole being; just as the poem comes from the whole being, the full experience of the poet. I have tried to show how this happened in the case of Christopher Smart. His madness did not destroy his intellect, or let us rather say his understanding (for intellect is associated too much with the kind of brain possessed by philosophers and mathematicians and eminent lawyers) when he wrote the *Song to David*. If we knew nothing of Smart's life, should we say that the poem was the work of a madman? I think not. What his mental disturbance does seem to have effected was, as I have suggested, an estrangement of his mind from his century, a liberation of the vein of true and impassioned poetry that was in him but so long disguised and hidden.

We picture Smart as developing from a boy of keen sensibilities into a young man of careless and convivial habits. A Fellow of his College at Cambridge he thought of himself—it is the theme of a poem—as a caged eagle; a secluded scholar's life was little to his taste. He disliked constraint and discipline. Between him and Gray, who was also a Fellow of Pembroke, there was the same kind

of natural antipathy as between Dostoevsky and Turgenev; Gray's regular habits and precise demeanour irritated his impulsive and emotional temperament. The other dons were lenient to his lapses. Probably they were not different from the contemporary Oxford dons, of whom Gibbon wrote, 'Their dull and deep potations excused the brisk intemperance of youth'. So far Smart appears to the world as the not uncommon type of artist who essays to fill the part of a man of genius as popularly conceived, hoping that an irresponsible egoism with a touch of wildness and a spirit of self-confidence will reflect prestige upon his mediocre productions. Of intellectual or imaginative revolt against the prevalent ideals there is not a trace.

He marries in secret, leaves Cambridge, becomes an inhabitant of Grub Street, a literary hack. He had always been in debt, and with a weak constitution was careless of his health. Whatever his failings, he was a lovable being, friendly and affectionate, and did not want for friends like Johnson and Garrick; but as a poet he seems a mere candidate for oblivion. Beneath this rather squalid exterior existence what powers were lurking? Both his madness and his hidden vein of splendid poetry seem to have been intimately allied with the religious enthusiasm which had been growing within him, we do not know for how long. Religious emotion had not lifted Smart's Seatonian compositions on the Supreme Being into poetry. But madness came with violent paroxysms, and the miracle was somehow effected. Religious exaltation was for once fused with richly sensuous imagery, and Smart's secret nature came glowing into light.

There was no second flowering. We have a glimpse of Smart after his release from confinement in a pleasant lodging overlooking Birdcage Walk and St. James's Park. We read of his 'ardour of kindness'; and again we see him through the eyes of Fanny Burney 'extremely grave' and still with 'great wildness in his manners, looks, and voice'. But the end was not now distant. In the course of a few years, says his discreet biographer, 'Mr. Smart's œconomy forsook him, and he was confined for debt in the King's Bench'. There he died, and so we take farewell of him. Were his last years consoled by the consciousness of having created that one marvellous poem? Or had he perhaps forgotten that he had ever written it?

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